



THE
CONFessions
OF
A FRIVOLOUS GIRL



ROBERT GRANT



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THE · CONFESSIONS
OF
A FRIVOLOUS GIRL

A STORY OF FASHIONABLE LIFE

EDITED BY

ROBERT GRANT

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ETC.

WITH VIGNETTE ILLUSTRATIONS

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I.

MY FIRST BALL.

“THE carriage has been at the door twenty minutes, Alice. Are you never coming?”

It was dear Papa's voice reverberating up from the regions below; and I, a timid *débutante*, on the eve of my first ball, surrounded by Mamma, two of my aunts, and three female attendants, was standing before my mirror, giving the finishing touches to a toilette, the duration of which had severely taxed my patience. My hand, trembling with excitement, gave one final pat to the delicate curve of water-waves that fringed my brow, — classic, I believe; at least, I have been told so, — and my maid approached to lay over my bare arms and shoulders the conventional fleecy cloak. My dress was from Paris, — a simple white tulle, the overskirt trimmed with artificial flowers. A single red rose in my dark brown hair; that was all.

“ Alice ! ”

“ Yes, Papa, in one minute.”

Mamma, who was herself already dressed, scanned me with a critical eye from head to foot, gave a parting pull to my dress behind, and then, with a quiet smile of approval, stooped to imprint a kiss upon my cheek.

“ How perfectly lovely you look, Alice dear ! ” said Aunt Gertrude, with a sigh of admiration.

“ Your dress is exquisite, my darling,” exclaimed Aunt Louise, as, examining me all over through her eye-glass, she described a circle around me; “ but I think,” she added, turning to Mamma, “ that that skirt does not hang exactly right yet.”

“ Oh, bother, bother, bother ! ” I murmured, with a little stamp of my foot; but, though more restless in spirit than deer-hound straining on a leash, I was forced to stand still while twenty fingers tugged and hauled, and stitched the refractory garment into place.

“ Alice ! ”

“ Ready at last, Papa.” But as I spoke, horror upon horrors ! one of the servants ushered into my chamber a good-natured-looking, middle-aged woman with the words, “ Miss Alice, here is your old nurse, Jane Sullivan, as would like to see you dressed.”

“I am glad to see you, Jane,” said I, with an attempt at enthusiasm, for I was really fond of the old woman who had nourished me in infancy; “but you must be quick, for Papa is waiting.”

“O Miss Alice,” she cried, holding up her hands in an ecstasy of admiration, “who’d have thought as how you’d look so beautiful!” And then, turning to Mamma, the ancient retainer poured out her soul in the hoarse whisper, “She do look just elegant, Mum, and it will be the lucky lad that gets her.”

This was embarrassing, and, having donned my cloak again, I fled from the laughter that followed. Along the entry-way and down the staircase I tripped, light-footed and light-hearted as a fairy, rejoicing in the consciousness that the dream of so many months was about to be realized at last, and that I was actually *en route* for my first party. My first party! Oh the rapture of it! What bliss to think that I was to be no longer a little girl, but a grown woman, able to do just what I liked and go where I pleased; perhaps, if fortune was kind, to cut a figure in the gay world, and become, not exactly a belle of course, but liable to have one or two of those mysterious creatures called men at my feet, even possibly (it would be dreadful, but awfully fascinating) break a stray heart! But

then, oh ghastly thought! suppose nobody should speak to me, and I should be obliged to sit all through the evening alone in a corner, the way Mary Addison, who "came out" the winter before, had to do! Yes, that would be my fate; I felt it in my bones, I knew it would. But if it was, I would never go anywhere again, no, never! The mere thought made me fairly shiver, and as I came into the parlor and saw Papa, standing in evening-dress before the fireplace, with his hands behind his back, type of the awful creatures I should have to face, my courage gave way completely, and I sank down upon the sofa, crying, "O Papa, Papa, I shall have a horrid time, I know I shall!"

"Yes, I suppose you will, my dear," was the cruel, laughing reply.

"I am sure that nobody will speak to me. There will not be a soul in the room that I know."

"Probably not, my child."

"Oh, how mean of you, Papa! But I warn you that if I have to sit without anybody to talk to, I shall come home and go into a convent and — and never come out again."

"Very well, Alice; but, convent or no convent, the carriage is waiting, and I hear your mother's step on the stairs. You had better get your flowers."

“Oh yes, to be sure ; I had almost forgotten them.” And with that I ran across the hall into the dining-room, where my bouquets were lying on a table near the open window, each swathed in cotton-wool and reposing in a green pasteboard florist’s box. There were three of them,—one composed entirely of lovely deep-pink Bonselline rosebuds, the gift of a thoughtful male cousin ; another from Aunt Louise of roses and mixed flowers. Mixed flowers, forsooth ! Ugh ! why is it that women never know how to send flowers to other women ? The idea, too, of carrying a bouquet from one’s aunt ! A Boston girl would consider that it was acting under false pretences, and would leave it at home. But then, thought I, as I raised the despised bouquet from its fellows, and turned it around critically in the light, I am not a Boston girl, and it would be a shame, you know, to hurt dear Aunt Louise’s feelings. Besides, nobody need know who sent it unless I tell them, and three bouquets look a great deal better than two. “Yes,” said I with a repentant kiss, “I mean to carry you, you poor abused things ; and after all, you are not so *very* ugly.”

But my special pride and glory was my third bouquet, a gorgeous bunch of dark-red Jacqueminot roses interspersed with yellow Maréchal Neils. They had been sent to me by a young New-Yorker,

Mr. Manhattan Blake, who had been introduced to me the preceding summer at Newport, and whom I had met once or twice afterwards at little teas or lawn-tennis parties, to which, considering that I was so nearly a "bud," I had occasionally been allowed to go. They were perfectly lovely, but I could not possibly imagine why he had sent them. It was awfully nice of him, however, and I could not help feeling a kind of secret satisfaction, which was very wrong, I know, in thinking how mad it would make the other girls.

Mamma's voice interrupted my meditations, and, armed with all this wealth of flowers, I returned to the parlor.

"Well, Alice," said Papa, "you look like the Princess in the fairy tale. Upon my word, I envy your partners. If I were a young man I should fall dead in love with you."

"Oh, how silly, Papa!" said I.

"Don't fill the child's head with such nonsense," cried Mamma, severely. "Come, Alice, it is time to go."

Papa laughed, and, bending down, kissed me on the forehead. "Oh, my water-waves! look out for my water-waves!" I shrieked in an agony of apprehension; and, breaking from his fond embrace, I rushed to the looking-glass to discover if those

precious objects of solicitude were the worse for such demonstrative conduct. They were still intact, and with a playful wave of my handkerchief at Papa, I tripped down the front-door steps after my mother, and got into the carriage. "Mrs. Barnum Van Amburgh's, Fifth Avenue," said Papa to the driver, and away we rolled from the home of my childhood.

It may be well, before proceeding further, to give some account of my previous life, although the lives of girls up to the period when they enter society are apt to be very uneventful, and mine has been no exception to the general rule. I was born in New York in the year 1858, and my father's family is among the oldest in the city. Papa's own name is Van Rooster Palmer. My mother lived in Boston before she was married, and among her ancestors was one of the Pilgrim Fathers who came over in the "Mayflower." She has always been proud of her antecedents, and brought me up to regard the various deceased members of her family as remarkable persons.

When about six years old, I was sent to a select Kindergarten, where my associates were children whose parents were all known to Mamma, and shortly afterwards I began to take lessons on the piano from Miss Chambers, a respectable and

accomplished young lady, compelled to earn a livelihood by giving instruction in music, owing to her father's having misappropriated the funds of a bank while cashier, thereby affording Mamma an opportunity to practise philanthropy as well as provide for my education. Such was the tenor of my days during the doll and baby-house stage of existence; but when playthings ceased to have a charm for me, and I had begun to wear my hair down my back, in a braid ornamented with colored ribbons, Mamma took advantage of a vacancy in a school for young ladies, kept by Miss Gobang, a first-class disciplinarian, and for the next six years I sat directly under the eye of that experienced teacher. The course of study, in addition to the usual English branches and French, German, and Italian, included more or less instruction in Physics, Latin, Botany, Art, Geology, Astronomy, and Metaphysics. Besides which we had weekly exercises in composition, lectures on hygiene, and daily drill in gymnastics. It was very nice to be able to range over such a wide field of knowledge, for I never liked to study any one thing very long, and it was one of Miss Gobang's pet theories that it was best for a woman to know a little of every thing, and nothing thoroughly.

But the sweetest memories of that happy period

belong to the friendships that I made and broke with my girl schoolmates. Shall I ever forget that little bun-shop, round the corner, to which we used to steal away at recess, although against the rules, and treat ourselves (girls rarely treat each other) to gingerbread and other delicacies? It was there, I remember, that Mattie Van Ulster and I, one morning, in an ecstasy of mutual confidence, poured out our souls to one another over a pickled lime. I told her that she was my best friend, she declared that I was hers, and we vowed that nothing on earth should ever part us. Alas for the constancy of girlish affection, within a week she called me a "hateful thing," and I — it makes me blush to recall it now — stuck out my tongue at her, and walked away, tittering, arm in arm with fascinating Guendolen Hochheimer.

During the last year of my school life, however, a change came over the spirit of my dreams. It no longer gave me amusement to play "I spy" and "tag" with the other girls; but, arm in arm with Grace Irving, who had then become in earnest, and ever will be, my best friend, my recess was spent in walking sedately up and down on the sidewalk in front of our school. The braid with its bright ribbons that had once adorned my back was discarded for a graceful coil, and a long dress

added several inches to my height. Sometimes it happened that the young men whom we met at dancing-school would pass us during our promenade, whereupon we would bow in a shy, constrained manner, blush, and for some reason that I could never discover, look at one another and laugh.

But the day came at last when all this had an end. One bright June morning, our class (there were twelve besides myself) assembled in the school-room in rather better clothes than usual, to say good-by to our dear teacher. Miss Gobang appeared in the gray silk dress worn immemorially by her on such occasions; and after we had talked and laughed a little together, rapping on her desk with the ruler, she called us to order, and delivered an address full of the kindest advice, and overflowing with feeling. When, after one of her most touching periods, she paused for a moment to conceal her emotion, one of the girls nudged me, and I went up to the desk with a large parcel in my arms, and said, "Miss Gobang, the graduating class hope you will accept this copy of Irving's works as a slight token of their affection and esteem." The room was so still one might have heard a pin drop. I took my seat, and Miss Gobang busied herself for a moment or two in examining the books; then, giving one of her peculiar

little coughs, she looked up, and with tears in her eyes said, simply, "Thank you, my dears."

There was rather an awkward silence after this; but presently, without continuing her address, Miss Gobang invited us into the adjoining room, where we found, as we expected, a cold collation ready for us; and while we were eating the ice-cream, she handed round a basket of little cakes marked in frosting with each of our names.

Returning home that day with Grace Irving, in rather a mournful frame of mind, Mamma met us at the door with the exciting exclamation, "They have arrived, Alice dear."

"What have arrived?" said I, totally at a loss as to her meaning.

"Your French clothes, my love."

"O Mamma!" I cried, and Grace and I immediately tore upstairs to the spare-room, where the two huge trunks had been placed. The lids were already open, and it was with a sort of awe that we lifted the folds of delicate tissue-paper to peep at the treasures beneath. That afternoon I had great fun trying them on. There were six in all, and each was perfectly lovely in its way; but the white tulle which I have already described pleased me most.

At dinner I noticed that Papa was put out about

something. He would scarcely speak to Mamma at all, and his answers to me, towards whom his manner is usually so sweet, were extremely short. I took advantage of his leaving the room to ask Mamma if we had offended him in any way.

"Custom-house duties, my child, that's all," Mamma replied with a sigh. "Papa has had to pay a great deal for your clothes."

"Oh, I am awfully sorry," said I.

"They call it smuggling," Mamma went on, "to try and bring in French clothes free of duties. But it is n't smuggling. All the laws in the world could not persuade me that it is so."

"Why is n't it?" cried Papa, who, re-entering the room at the moment, overheard the speech.

"Because it is n't," said Mamma. Whereupon a gloomy silence fell upon the household which was not dispelled for several days.

During the ensuing summer, which we spent at our cottage at Newport, Mamma took pains to keep me well in hand, as she called it. I was not allowed to go to any parties with the exception of very informal affairs, such as the lawn-tennis parties previously alluded to; and everybody was studiously informed that I was not yet "out," as the technical phrase is. Much of my time, needless to say, was passed in revolving my hopes and fears for the coming winter.

But now at last the fetters had been removed, and I was free to taste the pleasures of society to my heart's content.

The carriage drew up at Mrs. Van Amburgh's door, and as I stepped out upon the carpeting spread to protect our slippers from the cold damp sidewalk, faint strains of one of Strauss's most delicious waltzes were wafted across the night air to my all-impatient ears. A half-dozen serious-looking servants, in faultless evening-dress, bowed us through the spacious hall, and, trembling like an aspen leaf, I followed Mamma up the oaken staircase. At the top of the first flight we came upon what seemed to poor inexperienced me a fairy spectacle. Two large brilliantly lighted rooms, with the intervening entry-way, were filled almost to overflowing with a gay throng, whose hum and laughter, mingling with the crash of the music, had the most bewildering effect upon my senses. Closely following in Mamma's wake, I threaded my way (for we were late) between rows of lovely, beautifully dressed girls, who, half reclining on the divans and chairs that lined the entry-way, and even on the lower steps of the stairs themselves, were receiving the homage of numerous young men who hovered about them in the various postures that admiration assumes in society.

About the doorways that led from the entry into the larger rooms, were other groups of young men leaning against the walls and one another, whose faces depicted a varied range of emotions, and who, as I afterwards discovered, numbered among them the philosophers, soreheads, and diffident members of the fashionable world. Pausing for a moment, while several couples on the stairs, whose *tête-à-têtes* our advent had interrupted, made room for Mamma to pass, I could not help overhearing a young man, in one of these latter groups, whisper to his neighbor in evident allusion to me, —

“Who is that awfully nice-looking little girl?”

“That? Oh, that’s a bud. Considerable *sang-froid*, so to speak, for one so young, has n’t she? Miss Palmer is her name, Miss Alice Palmer; and rather the correct thing they tell me. There’s your chance, old man, — unimpeachable social position, only daughter, — rich and delicate-looking father, apoplectic mother; what more do you want, Gerald?”

“Oh, I’m not a marrying man, you know, my dear fellow,” replied the other. “I like all the dear little things too much to confine myself to any *one*. If it ever comes across me that any one of the darlings is getting too fond of me, I always make a point of telling her that I intend never to marry, and thereby free myself from all responsibility.”

"You always *were* a considerate man, Gerald," was the sardonic reply.

During this dialogue I could feel the blood mounting to my cheeks, and I hardly knew whether to be angry or amused; but when I reached a curve in the staircase, I turned my head and snatched a sidelong glance at my critics. It was easy to identify them, from the fact that their eyes were still following my retreating figure. One of them, a tall slim young man with a light complexion and straw-colored whiskers, stood languidly leaning against the panel of the door, his feet and hands crossed in front of him, from one of the latter of which his opera-hat hung pendent. He was eminently good-looking, quite distinguished-looking, in fact; but the effect that his physical beauty might otherwise have produced was spoiled for me by his too apparent consciousness of his own attractions, and a *blasé*, almost effeminate air that characterized his every movement. I knew instinctively that it must have been he who had alluded to my sex in general as "dear little things;" and, recalling the name by which his companion had addressed him, it dawned upon me that this was undoubtedly the famous Mr. Gerald Pumystone, whom I had often heard spoken of as one of the leading young men in society.

The appearance of Mr. Pumystone's friend was a marked contrast to his own. He was a man in the neighborhood of thirty, and ostensibly the senior of Mr. Pumystone by some four or five years. He was slightly shorter than the latter, but his general physique was much larger, and conveyed the impression of a strong, powerful person, a trifle inclined to *embonpoint*. His face was full and rather massive. His close-cropped, slightly curly hair and heavy mustache were black. He had big sympathetic dark-brown eyes, of which the gaze seemed to hold one spell-bound, and about his mouth lurked an expression half-wicked, but altogether fascinating. "Oh," said I to myself, "what an interesting-looking creature!" and perhaps that term "interesting-looking" will convey, at any rate to other girls, a clearer idea of what he was like than any further description of mine could do.

On reaching the dressing-room, Mamma gave me another careful inspection, and after a final pull at my skirt, led the way downstairs. I gave one long glance at the mirror to see that every thing was right, and followed her with quaking heart. Papa was waiting for us at the first landing, but as soon as we reached the entry-way, two eager-looking young men with *boutonnieres* in their

button-holes, and who, as I subsequently learned, had been deputed by Mrs. Van Amburgh to convey the guests to her presence, came forward and offered us their arms.

I mechanically followed Mamma's example, and suffered myself to be led away by one of them. As he said nothing to me I said nothing to him, and he pioneered a way for me into the front parlor, in one corner of which our hostess with her daughter Maud, for whom the party had been given, was receiving the company. The latter, a dumpy little Hebe, with fat rosy cheeks and bewitching brown eyes, was standing beside her mother, grasping five superb rosebud bouquets; and as each guest brought up for presentation bowed before her, she would smile demurely over the tops of her flowers, and give a quaint little duck to her body that passed for a courtesy.

Mrs. Van Amburgh, herself a stately, gracious-looking lady, who must in youth have been very handsome, attired in a rich claret-colored dress cut square in front, greeted each of her friends, as they approached, with a charming smile and pressure of the hand, and in the marvellous rapidity with which, without disregarding any of the canons of politeness, she disposed of one and turned to another, suggested the neat action of Papa's

breech-loader, which, in less time than it takes to describe, discharges itself, throws out the old cartridge, replaces a new one, and is in readiness for a second shot.

"How good of you to come!" she cried to Mamma. "I hope that Mr. Palmer is with you. Oh yes, here he is. Mr. Palmer I am delighted to see you; and, Alice, dear, how lovely you look! You must be sure and have a nice time." And then she turned her graceful head to welcome old Colonel Huckins, who had entered the room just behind us.

"O Alice, I am *so* glad to see you," cried Maud, enthusiastically. "It is so late that I had begun to be afraid that you were not coming. I can't give you my hand, my dear, as you perceive, but I am ever so pleased that you are here."

"Alice," interrupted Mamma at this moment, giving me a sort of nudge, "I want you to know Colonel Huckins. He is a very old friend of mine. We knew one another when we were children." I turned, and found myself face to face with a good-natured-looking, puffy old gentleman, with small eyes and comparatively no neck.

"Is it possible, Mrs. Palmer," said he, "that you have a daughter old enough to be in society? I would never have believed it unless you had told me; upon my word, I would n't, he! he!" where-

upon the old gentleman broke into a chuckling laugh, as if he had said a decidedly clever thing.

“And how do *you* like the gay world, my dear?” he continued, turning to me. “I suppose that all the young fellows are at your feet, of course. If I were a young fellow I should feel myself in great danger,—yes, in great danger, ho! ho!” As he spoke, he gave a kindly leer at me, that was intended to be complimentary, and exploded again into one of his guffaws.

I smiled a sickly smile, and blushed up to the roots of my hair. I could not think of a single thing to say, so I stammered out something about this being my first party.

“That’s right, that’s right,” was the reply, which showed that Colonel Huckins could not have understood very distinctly what I said. “I shall have to guard my heart very carefully, I see; for although I am an old chap, he! he! I am terribly susceptible still,—yes, terribly susceptible, ho! ho!”

“Charming, oh, charming,” he whispered to Mamma. “Just what you were at her age. A dangerous pair, ho! ho! As the poet says, ‘*Matre pulchra filia pulchrior.*’” Chuckling over which very ancient jest, kind-hearted Colonel Huckins hobbled across to the other side of the room.

I was left standing alone by the side of Mamma, for the young man who escorted me to the presence of our hostess had slipped away the moment after I released his arm. Frightened as I was, I ventured to cast a few glances about me. The reception-room was occupied principally by the fathers and mothers, for most of the young people had retired to the entry-way and stairs, or were waltzing in the room beyond, which had apparently been stripped of furniture and devoted to the use of the dancers. In my immediate neighborhood, however, was a group of seven or eight girls who seemed to have no gentlemen talking to them. Some of them were seated upon a sofa, and the rest were standing close to the wall. I recognized that two or three of these were, like myself, *débutantes*, and it was evident, from their faces as well as from the fact that they were chatting together in a nervous, excited sort of way, as if entirely uninterested in what they were saying, that they felt embarrassed and uncomfortable. The countenances of the others, to whom this was presumably no novel experience, wore a look of patient, calm despair, and brought vividly before me those unhappy creatures described by Dante in his "Inferno," a little of which I had read, with the aid of a translation, at Miss Gobang's school,

who, on account of something that was their misfortune, and not their fault, lived without hope in a state of perpetual desire.

“Oh,” thought I, “how dreadful it must be! Perhaps this is what I am reserved for; perhaps nobody will ever speak to me, and I shall stand just where I am all the evening.” I felt myself shaking all over, and even on the condition of never going to another party, I would have given worlds to have been safe at home again.

“Good evening, Miss Palmer,” said a voice close to my ear. I turned round hurriedly, and there stood Mr. Manhattan Blake, the young man who had sent me the flowers.

“Oh, how do you do, Mr. Blake?” I did n’t know whether I ought to shake hands with him or not, so I put my hand half-way out and drew it hastily back again. Of course this was dreadfully embarrassing, and I felt all my ideas leaving me on the spot.

“I have not seen you since we were at Newport,” said he.

“No,” said I, “and oh, Mr. Blake, I want to thank you for these lovely roses. It was awfully kind of you to send them.”

He acknowledged my speech by a bow, and I thought that he blushed a little, as he said, “It gave me great pleasure to send them.”

"I am so fond of flowers," I added, burying my face among the beauties to inhale their fragrance.

"Don't you think it would be pleasanter in the other room, Miss Palmer?" said he.

"Perhaps it *would*." I took his arm, and as he led me out into the entry-way where the other girls were, the hare-like timidity that had oppressed me seemed to vanish completely. With head erect, and eyes sparkling with excitement, I boldly faced the brilliant throng, many of whom paused for a moment in their avocations to gaze at the new "bud."

Oh, what fun it was! All around me I saw girls whom I knew, and had supposed in many cases to have nothing in them, with three, four, and even five young men bending over, sitting beside them, or on ottomans at their feet. I caught a glimpse of Grace Irving, ensconced in a corner with two stylish-looking creatures, and waved my fan at her. She recognized me, and gave a radiant nod in return, while one of her companions, whom I then perceived to be Mr. Gerald Pumy-stone, put up his eye-glass and stared at me. I am afraid I blushed, but I tried to look supremely unconscious of his existence.

"Is n't it splendid, Alice?" whispered Mamie Stonenger, a charming "bud," who, all aglow with

excitement, passed me at this moment, on the arm of a tall, attractive-looking young man.

“Perfectly thrilling, Mamie dear,” I murmured in response, bending back my neck until my lips almost touched her shell-like ear. Thrilling it certainly was, and what with the glare of the lights, the music, the lovely flowers that decked the rooms, the beautiful dresses and incessant hum of laughter-laden voices, a bewildered, dazed sort of feeling began to steal over me, and I caught myself saying any thing that came into my head, without thinking what it was or what it meant.

“Oh, Mr. Blake, what a heavenly-looking floor!”

“It is comparatively clear now, I see. Shan’t we have our turn?”

“I should like one very much. But remember, Mr. Blake, I waltz horribly. I am only an inexperienced ‘bud,’ you know.” This was a wicked falsehood, for I had always been at dancing-school one of Mr. Pantaletti’s favorite pupils.

Mr. Blake smiled incredulously, and, placing his arm about my waist, whirled me into the vortex. Oh, what glorious fun it was as we went gliding around on that delicious inlaid floor, to the notes of Strauss’s “Autograph” waltz! We seemed positively to have wings, and my partner, who danced divinely, guided with such skill that we had very

few collisions. But what mattered an occasional bump? It only made it all the more exciting. Once or twice I became painfully conscious that strips from my precious train were floating around me, and visions of Mamma's wrath on the morrow somewhat dampened the ardor of my skipping spirit; but only for a moment, and then, summoning all my energies, I drove the phantom thence, and abandoned myself to the dance and all its consequences. We stopped at last from sheer exhaustion, and Mr. Blake, leading me into a recess formed by the window at the further end of the room, seized my fan and began to fan me vigorously.

"How per — perfectly splendid!" I cried, as soon as I could get my breath.

"That was one of the most charming turns I ever had in my life, Miss Palmer."

"What nonsense, Mr. Blake! If you talk like that, I shan't believe any thing you say."

But I thought, nevertheless, that it was awfully nice of him to say it; and he looked, too, as if he meant it, which was nicer still.

"What a cruel speech, Miss Palmer! I am terribly in earnest. Won't you believe me?" There was a beseeching look in his eyes that made me feel a little wicked.

“I could n’t. I would like to, but I was warned beforehand not to believe any thing to-night that any one told me, and I promised I would n’t.”

“And you absolutely refuse to make an exception in my case?”

“Well, I’ll see. I will think it over. Will that satisfy you?” and as I spoke, I gave an unintentional little glance out from under my eyelashes, that made Mr. Blake, for some reason or other that I could not understand, blush, and look down at his pumps.

“I suppose it will have to,” said he in reply, with an expression of mock despair.

As I gazed at him, I could not help feeling that he was really quite attractive. He had a refined, slightly delicate-looking face. His complexion was light, and he wore no mustache, beard, or whisker. His — But I think, on the whole, that I will not describe his personal appearance any further, for young men in society all look so much alike that to convey a definite impression of their individual advantages by any mere verbal description, requires the skill of one versed in the delineation of character. Besides, the way in which a man says things makes a great deal more difference to a girl than whether he is good-looking or not, unless, of course, he is *very* handsome, and Mr. Blake was hardly that. On the other hand,

however, he had an extremely gentlemanly air — But no, I positively will not say any thing more about his looks.

We returned to the entry-way in a few moments, and although seats in that desired locality were at a premium, we were fortunate enough to arrive on the scene just as another couple vacated a charming little nook under the stairs. There we ensconced ourselves, I in a comfortable arm-chair and Mr. Blake on an ottoman at my feet. We talked about all sorts of things, and I found conversation much more easy than I expected. Mr. Blake was very interesting and pleasant, and after a little while he began to tell me something about himself. I found out that he was just finishing his law studies, and expected before long to practise for himself. He confided to me that his secret ambition in life was to be a writer, and that he thought his abilities lay in that direction, but that he had been obliged to sacrifice his tastes to pecuniary considerations, and pursue a profession for which he had more or less liking, but no decided love. Then he told me about his college life, and discoursed beautifully on books. He seemed to have read a good deal, especially of poetry, and I discovered that his views on art and ideals were in many respects similar to my own.

"It must be very nice, Mr. Blake," said I, "to have a regular occupation, and an aim in life. Men have such an advantage in that respect over us poor girls."

"Have they? Yes," said he, resting his chin on his hand with a thoughtful air, "I suppose they have. But think of the responsibilities that men have to incur, and the difficulty of living up to one's standard of action in the midst of the bustle and turmoil of business life."

"It must be terribly hard; still, I should think there would be a great deal of satisfaction in the mere consciousness of having a lofty ideal."

"Yes, but much discouragement, too. The world is so selfish, and the motives that influence people are so degraded."

"Do you really think they are, Mr. Blake? How dreadful! I hate to think that it is so."

"And then, too, there is something repulsive to me in the idea of tying one's self down for life to one pitiful occupation, the principal object of which is the mere acquisition of sordid money, when there is so much about us in the world that might otherwise be enjoyed. Only think of the vast treasure-house of pleasure that books contain! What subtle charms there are in beautiful music! or, again, how much joy one might derive

from the contemplation and study of Nature in her myriad forms! I have often thought that I would like to wander off through the world by myself, wherever fortune or inclination might guide me, seeking to do good, untrammelled by wretched codes and conventionalities."

As Mr. Blake spoke, he bent towards me with a yearning, half-sad expression on his pale face, and a mysterious, almost inspired light in his gray eyes. "How splendid," thought I, "to have such earnest, serious views of life!" and I exclaimed, —

"Oh, Mr. Blake, I, too, have often thought of that. Just like Kenelm Chillingly, you mean."

"Yes, Miss Palmer; I had Kenelm Chillingly in mind when I spoke. His life has always seemed to me almost ideal."

"I am so glad to hear you say so. It is my favorite novel, I think. What a delicious sort of existence his must have been, roaming through the country, incognito and untrammelled, as you suggested, by social obligations."

Papa at this moment interrupted our *tête-à-tête*, and proceeded, to my consternation, to introduce Mr. Gerald Pumystone, who, making me a most magnificent bow, exclaimed, with effusion: "I have been trying to be introduced to you all the evening, Miss Palmer, but, really, you have been

so surrounded, you know, that I found it quite impossible before."

I felt all my fears returning, and I could not think of a thing to say. The grandeur of the creature appalled me; for, in spite of his foibles, I could not help owning to myself that he was exceedingly stylish-looking. There was a finish about him that others somehow seemed to lack, observable even in the exquisite symmetry of his white necktie; and, in fact, all the little details of dress which men think that girls never notice, were evidently, with him, matters of forethought and consideration. He appeared so imposing, and so frightfully at his ease, that I felt completely crushed, and all I managed to stammer out was, "Doesn't the room look lovely?"

I would have given worlds to have recalled the inane speech the moment after I had made it; but, fortunately, Mr. Pumystone did not seem to consider it out of the way at all.

"Oh, charmingly, most charmingly," he replied; and, with a glance that was intended to be killing, he sat down beside me. As he did so, Mr. Blake rose from the ottoman, and, expressing the hope of seeing me later in the evening, took his departure.

As a preliminary movement, Mr. Pumystone

took my fan from my lap, and, having opened it, and approached his face much nearer mine than was altogether agreeable, proceeded to fan me with much apparent devotion.

“You will excuse me, I know, Miss Palmer,” said he, with an extremely confidential air, calculated to convey the impression that I was very dear to him, “if I say that you are looking charmingly to-night.”

What reply could I make to such a remark as that? I blushed—I could not help blushing, and looked down at my flowers. I knew, of course, that he did not mean it; still it was a new experience, and rather amusing, for a change.

“I do not think,” pursued he, “that there is any thing in the world that has such an effect on me as a beautiful woman,—that is, a truly beautiful woman, beautiful in the artistic sense of the word; I despise dolls. Between ourselves, I do not care much for society. I go to parties mostly *pour passer le temps*, you know; but I consider myself, nevertheless, susceptible, immensely susceptible, to the influence of beauty. If I were a marrying man, which I am not (sometimes I think that it would be better for me if I were, but that is neither here nor there), I should have succumbed long ago.”

“Why do you object to marriage, Mr. Pumy-stone?” I asked. “I do not object to marriage theoretically, Miss Palmer. For the ordinary individual it is highly desirable. But a temperament like mine would chafe under its restraint. I am fickle, very fickle. It is to be regretted, perhaps, but undeniably the fact; and I am of the opinion that my constancy would not bear the test of time. My disposition is a very peculiar one. It is absolutely necessary *que je m’amuse*, amuse myself, you understand. *Des beaux yeux* are indispensable to my happiness, but I must have variety, *comprenez-vous?*”

“I think I do a little.” I did not in the least, but I could not bear to appear obtuse.

“Speaking of beautiful eyes, Miss Palmer, has any one ever told you that yours are what are called liquid? They remind me very much of those of a dear little English girl, whom I met in the Tyrol in the summer of 1876. She had just the same large striking violet eyes that you have.”

I felt that I was blushing up to the organs of sight referred to; and, with my head down, I began to trifle with my flowers.

“What nonsense, Mr. Pumystone! You ought not to take advantage of my inexperience by saying such things as that.”

"You would agree with me if you could but have seen her, Miss Palmer. *Elle était charmante, éblouissante,*" said he; and his eyes, as they regarded me, wore such an intense expression that I felt rather frightened, and changed the conversation by asking him to tell me who some of the most interesting people about us were.

"You know everybody, of course, Mr. Pumystone."

"I suppose that I do. I always make a point of being introduced to every young lady as soon as she comes out."

"How very considerate of you!"

Mr. Pumystone gave me a suspicious glance; but as my face looked the picture of gravity, he replied, "Oh, no, I prefer it;" and then asked me if I would not like to stroll through the rooms for a little while.

I took his arm, and as we promenaded up and down the entry-way, I could not help feeling just a little secret thrill of triumph. I knew, instinctively, that Mr. Pumystone was not really so nice, in the best sense of the word, as Mr. Blake, even; but somehow or other, it flattered me more to be seen walking with him.

His beauty, irreproachable social position (his

mother was a Vangaasbag), and reputed wealth had made him, to such an extent, the cynosure of both maidenly and matronly eyes in the gay world, that I knew any girl who saw me with him would think I was having a perfectly splendid time, and that was much more important than whether I was really having a splendid time or not.

After wandering about for a little, we had a delightful waltz; and, while I was fanning myself, in an exhausted condition, produced by the latter, I became aware of a young man with tow-colored hair, standing beside me, whom I recognized as Mr. Jimmy Noble, a Sophomore at Harvard College. He made me a most solemn kind of bow, and asked, "Are you engaged for this waltz, Miss Palmer?"

He was evidently young and shy, and seemed rather at a loss what to do with his hands. I don't know why exactly, but he gave me the impression of being very forlorn.

"I have promised Mr. Pumystone to dance it with him," I replied.

"Oh," said Mr. Noble. He stood looking at me for a moment, blushing, without saying a word. Then he asked if I were engaged for the next one.

"No," said I.

“ May I have the pleasure of dancing it with you? ”

“ Certainly,” said I. Whereupon he bowed again in the same solemn manner, and walked away.

“ Do you know that that young man is said to be a perfect genius? ” said Mr. Pumystone.

“ What! Mr. Noble? ”

“ Yes. He writes poetry and all that kind of thing, I believe. He is said to be tremendously clever.”

“ Really? Well, I should never have imagined it.”

Our conversation was here interrupted by Mr. Blake, who asked permission to introduce a friend of his, a Mr. Murray Hill. Upon my informing him that I should be very glad to know the latter, Mr. Blake winked his eye, or made some other sign, to a young man leaning against the wall on the other side of the room, who immediately began to stroll in my direction, and being met half-way by his friend, took his arm, and was formally introduced to me. Before we had any opportunity to say any thing, Mr. Pumystone slipped quietly away with the remark that he should see me later in the evening.

The first thing I noticed about Mr. Hill was that his gloves were not very clean, and that

there was a big rent in the right one, where the thumb joins the palm. In the effort to make the button and button-hole meet across his thick muscular wrist, he had evidently over-estimated the elasticity of the kid. He was a powerful-looking young man, with a serious, determined expression and a massive brow. His utterance was rapid and impulsive, and occasionally, as I subsequently noticed, he would, when excited by what he was saying, give vent to a little guttural sound, that resembled a snort more than any thing else, and push back over his forehead, with his hand, his dark hair, which protruded forward too much to be stylish.

“This is your first party, I believe, Miss Palmer?” said he, in a formal, respectful way, that was very gentlemanly, but did not cause me the slightest thrill.

“Yes, I am what is called a ‘bud,’” said I, with a smile.

“Are there many young ladies who are coming out this winter, besides yourself?”

“About forty-five, I believe.”

“What a large number!” said he, sedately.

“Yes.”

“I suppose that you are looking forward to this winter with great satisfaction.”

"I think I shall like society very much, Mr. Hill. It is delightful so far."

"I am glad that you have found it so," said he, with a serious bow, intended to be complimentary.

"Supper is ready, Miss Palmer, I believe. May I have the pleasure of taking you in?" said Mr. Blake, at this moment.

"Thank you," said I.

"Are you engaged for the German this evening, Miss Palmer?" asked Mr. Hill.

"No, I did n't know there was to be one."

"Yes, after supper. Mrs. Van Amburgh has asked me to lead it. I am her nephew, you know, and as my partner, Miss Van Rooster, is prevented from coming to-night, will you do me the honor of taking her place?" continued Mr. Hill.

"Thank you very much," said I, and as I walked away on the arm of Mr. Blake, I thought to myself, "Oh, what bliss to lead the German at my first party, but how hateful it was of him to let me know that I am second fiddle!"

We were among the last in the procession filing down the staircase to supper, which had been laid out in the dining-room on the lower story. The supper-room was already crowded to overflowing, and even in the hall there was such a crush that my partner was beginning to despair of finding a

seat for me, when I perceived Grace Irving signalling from a corner, where she was keeping guard over a chair that she had reserved for me.

“What will you have for supper?” asked Mr. Blake, as soon as I was comfortably established beside Miss Irving.

“Oh, I don’t know, — any thing,” said I.

“But you must choose.”

“I can’t. Bring me something nice, — oysters, ice-cream, or any thing.”

Then I turned to Grace, and while Mr. Blake was gone, we enjoyed a hurried interchange of confidences. We seemed to have had equally delightful experiences, and it was difficult to say which of us was the more enthusiastic in our expressions. I now had, for the first time during the evening, an opportunity to collect my scattered senses and look about me a little. From where I sat in the hall, I could catch glimpses in the room beyond of a circle of young men, three deep, gathered around what was presumably the supper-table, and all the available space between them and us was occupied by a nearly solid jam of girls, clustered together in chairs. A sea of black-coated individuals, deftly balancing plates laden with all kinds of delicacies, were struggling in the hope of ultimately reaching their partners through

the mazes of this mass of beauty, to the imminent peril of the latter, as was instanced in more than one case by the crash of falling glass and the spectacle of dripping garments.

Mr. Blake returned presently with my supper, and a napkin, almost as large as a table-cloth, which he proceeded to spread over my lap. I managed to trifle with a little chicken-salad, but I felt much too excited to eat. I sent him, however, for a glass of water, which refreshed me immensely. Several young men took advantage of its being supper-time to be introduced to me, and at one time I had as many as six talking to me at once. I found it quite impossible not to confound them with one another, and my head spun round and round in the effort to recollect all their names. I made the acquaintance, among others, of the gentleman who had discussed my merits with Mr. Pumystone, an hour before, and whom, during my bird's-eye view from the curve in the staircase, I had mentally characterized as "an interesting-looking creature." I found him more fascinating even than I had expected. He had a low melodious voice, with which he whispered delightful little speeches into my ear, with an air of respectful devotion that quite charmed me. I noticed that he was a trifle coarse-looking, and

something instinctively told me I must be on my guard against him; but of all the men whom I had seen, I felt that he (his name was Mr. Harry Coney) excited me the most.

After a little while Mr. Coney induced me to go upstairs again, and, leaning on his arm, I promenaded through the vacant cooled-off rooms, listening to most amusing stories, and receiving subtle compliments, between which and Mr. Pumystone's garish attempts there was as much difference as there is between a lovely oil-painting and a chromo. Once when I passed Mamma, I observed that she did not look over-pleased, and frowned at me, as if to indicate that I was doing something of which she did not approve, but I quieted my conscience with the reflection that it was very likely my dress or something about my expression that had disturbed her.

As soon as the music began again, our *tête-à-tête* was interrupted by the approach of Mr. Jimmy Noble, who reminded me, in faltering tones, that this was the waltz I had promised him. Mr. Coney looked unspeakable things, but I felt that it was necessary to keep my word, and with a chafing spirit, half escorted by, half dragging Mr. Noble, I returned to the dancing-room.

"If he dances well," said I to myself, "I can forgive him a great deal." The room was rather crowded, but Mr. Noble, nothing daunted, whirled me into the thick of the throng. For a moment all went well, and then, O horrors! my partner began to wobble about in a very ungraceful manner, and I felt his feet come rudely in contact with mine. Our motions began to resemble those of a cockle-boat in a raging sea, and we seemed to hop up and down without making any progress.

"Oh, oh, Miss Palmer, excuse me. I am a little rusty. I am not dancing well this evening," murmured he, plaintively.

"It is all my fault, Mr. Noble," said I.

"Not at all. Oh no, it's mine, I am aw—" The remainder of his reply was lost, for Mr. Noble having just then, in the endeavor to get into step again, made a sort of plunge or swoop, resembling the motion of a planchette-board, from one corner of the room to the other, we came violently in contact with two other couples, somebody planted an elbow in the middle of my back, and a second after, Mr. Noble and I were dashed breathless, and all in a bunch, against the wall.

"Oh dear, how very awkward! I am really very sorry. The floor was so slippery," sputtered out the unfortunate young man, who was blushing like

a June rose, and who looked the picture of misery.

"Oh, it does n't matter at all, Mr. Noble," I replied as sweetly as possible; but despair and rage were in my heart, for I saw that large fragments of my flounces were dragging over the floor. Opening my fan, I began to fan myself energetically as an outlet to my pent-up feeling.

Poor Mr. Noble stood beside me, looking very meek and unhappy. Presently he asked, "May I not fan you, Miss Palmer?"

"Oh no, thank you, I am quite cool now."

Fortunately, Mr. Murray Hill at this moment came up, and said that it was time for the "German." Seats for this delightful dance had been arranged, during supper-time, around the reception-room, the idea being that the couples should sit there and leave the dancing-room clear for the figures. Mr. Hill escorted me to a chair in one corner, which he said was the "head," and left me to ruminate, while he endeavored to make the other dancers take their seats. I noticed that a favorite device for securing good seats was to tie a handkerchief to a couple of chairs, beforehand, which gave the owner of the handkerchief an indisputable right to their possession. Every thing was at last reduced to order, and the array of lovely girls,

with their partners, that encircled the room, formed certainly a most picturesque sight, and I could not but feel elated to think that I was the happy leader of it all. Miss Van Amburgh had deemed it in better taste not to lead herself, and had taken a seat about the middle of the German.

When all was ready, Mr. Hill gave a signal, and the first four couples began to waltz with all their might and main.

"It is the right and left figure," said my partner in my ear, while we were whirling around with the others.

"Oh yes. But what am I to do?"

"You must take out some gentleman."

This was dreadful. I did not have the least idea whom to choose. We stopped waltzing, and I looked, in a bewildered manner, round the circle without seeming to see any one whom I knew. Finally I said, "I will take out Mr. Pumystone."

Mr. Hill led me up to him, and I timidly put out my hand to signify that he was to come out. He sprang forward with alacrity, beaming all over.

"I feel very much flattered, I am sure, Miss Palmer," said he, as he led me into the other room.

"What do we do next?" said I. I knew perfectly well, but it was necessary to say something.

“Watch me, watch me; it is very simple,” replied he.

We all formed a ring, and at a sign from the leader, we went round the circle from right to left, giving an alternate hand to each person that we met. Those who knew one another would accompany the movement with a friendly shake of the hand. As soon as we rotated back to the one whom we had taken out, the circle was dissolved by everybody's beginning to waltz again.

Mr. Pumystone conducted me back to my seat, and after a few words returned to his own.

And now followed an hour of happiness that I shall always recall with rapture. I feel sure that I shall never again experience such thrills of delight as I enjoyed during this my first German. Every one was so kind to me that I completely forgot my identity, and almost fancied that Mrs. Van Amburgh's ball-room was fairy-land, and I a fabled princess. It seemed too wonderful for belief, that the brilliant, audacious being now whirling over the floor in a sea of tattered tulle was really I, the timid, simple school-girl of yesterday. I think that I must have danced at least twice with every young man in the room, and there were some who seemed never to leave my side. As my partner had to attend to the German, I saw

very little of him, except in the intervals between the figures; but Mr. Pumystone, Mr. Blake, and two or three others were battling perpetually for his chair, which annoyed Mr. Hill a little, I thought. I did n't see why it should, I am sure.

Last of all, to crown the evening, came the bouquet figure, as it was called, which consisted simply in taking out some one of the opposite sex, and presenting her or him, as the case might be, with a lovely bunch of flowers or a *boutonnière*. I was dreadfully afraid that I should not get any, for I had already been taken out a great deal more than my share. But fortune, or whatever divinity it is that presides over the destinies of "buds," was kinder than my fears. One — two — three — four (this from Mr. Pumystone, with a wealth of compliment) — five — six (poor little Jimmy Noble's) — seven — eight (from Mr. Coney, I was nearly tickled to death by it) beauties fell to my lot; and last of all, Mr. Blake, with a slight blush, and a look of embarrassment, that made me feel a little awkward too, held out to me a cluster of roses, with the words, —

"Miss Palmer, I have been waiting ever so long to give you these. I hope you have enjoyed your evening."

“Oh yes; and I am so much obliged, Mr. Blake, for all your kindness.”

Mr. Blake mumbled something in reply, which I failed to catch (we were dancing at the time); and as he left me at my seat, seemed very shy and peculiar.

And whom did I give my *boutonnière* to? I hear some one ask. I did not want to give it to anybody; but since it seemed to be necessary, I presented mine to Mr. Coney. Mr. Blake was standing near by at the time, and I thought that he looked very unhappy because I did not give it to him, which was, of course, half the fun. The recipient of my favor, when our waltz was over, gave me a long look from his dark eyes, touched the rose that I had given him to his lips, and with a low bow, withdrew. Lost in reverie, I was dreaming of I know not what, when I suddenly became aware that my partner, Mr. Hill, was standing in front of me.

“Miss Palmer,” said he, “there is one bouquet left. Will you let me make you a present of it?”

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Hill; but I have so many. I mean I have been so lucky that—don’t you think it would be better to give it to one of the girls who has not got any?”

A shadow came over Mr. Hill's face, and he looked hurt. What touchy creatures men are! How could I have known that he really wanted me to have it? I supposed, of course, that he had offered it to me only out of politeness.

"You had better take it," said he, coldly.

"Well; if you insist. Thank you, very much;" and then I felt I had not treated him quite kindly, so I continued, — "You don't know how much I have enjoyed myself to-night, Mr. Hill. I shall always remember my first German as one of the epochs of my life."

He brightened up at once on hearing this, and said, —

"Of course you understood that, owing to my having to lead the German, I have not been able to see so much of you as I should have liked."

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Hill; I understood perfectly. You must be very tired; are n't you?"

"Not a bit. It is rather a new experience for me to lead, and therefore amusing. I don't go to parties much, as a rule."

"Why not, Mr. Hill?"

"I don't have time."

"Well, I can't imagine how any one who is invited can help going to a German. I think they are more fun than any thing on earth. Oh,

Mr. Hill, here comes my mother. I suppose that means that it is time to go home; I don't want to go at all."

"Come, Alice," said Mamma, who was on the arm of Colonel Huckins, "we had better be going; it is after one o'clock."

"Oh, a little longer, Mamma."

"No, dear."

"Just a little — only ten minutes."

"Yes; only ten minutes, Mrs. Palmer," cried kind-hearted Colonel Huckins.

"Do let her stay, Mrs. Palmer. Miss Palmer only asks for ten minutes," said my partner.

"Miss Palmer," whispered a pathetic voice at my side, "won't you give me one last turn?" It was Mr. Manhattan Blake.

"Ask Mamma," I replied, with a wicked glance from my eyes.

"Just one turn, Mrs. Palmer, — a very short one," besought Mr. Blake.

"Well," said Mamma, hesitating. "But mind, only ten minutes." And off I rushed on the arm of Mr. Blake, leaving my partner, poor Mr. Hill, looking mad as hops.

It was the polka redowa, — a dance which, as everybody knows, is not very pretty to look at, but awfully exciting. Feeling that it was my last

chance, I positively tore over the floor, regardless of my dress, — there was not much left of it, at any rate, — and every thing else, to tell the truth. We stopped at last, utterly exhausted, in a corner, as far as possible from Mamma.

“Miss Palmer,” murmured Mr. Blake, “thanks to you, I have had a most delightful evening.”

“Oh, really, Mr. Blake, I don’t see what I had to do with it,” I replied, with a little laugh.

There was a pause for a moment, and I began to feel half embarrassed, half inclined to laugh, for Mr. Blake looked dreadfully sentimental. I did n’t know what to make of it exactly.

“Won’t you give me a bud to remember this evening by?” said he presently, very shyly.

“Oh, I could n’t, Mr. Blake; besides, if you have had such a good time, you ought not to need any thing to remember it by.”

“Just one, — a little one.”

The poor fellow looked so dreadfully in earnest that it made me feel quite badly. The idea of his caring for a paltry, withered rosebud! What geese men are!

“You will only fling it in the street the moment you leave the house,” said I, looking down, and trifling with the roses he had sent me.

“That only shows how little you know me, Miss Palmer,” sighed he.

"I don't pretend to know you," I cried, with an arch smile. This was cruel, but I could not resist the temptation.

"You might have a little faith, I think."

He said it so nicely that I hesitated; and if a woman hesitates, the proverb says there is no use in further resistance. So I gave in. "I will try you for once," said I, with a blush. "Here!" As I spoke, I detached a little deep crimson bud from his bunch, and reached it out to him. He took it from my hand; and, blushing much more than I, put it in the left lapel of his coat.

"You see I have placed it over my heart," he whispered, softly.

"What a goose I was to give it to him! I wish I had n't," thought I.

"Alice!" It was Mamma's voice in my ear. "You have been over fifteen minutes already. You are not to be trusted, I see."

"I have been all ready for five minutes, Mamma," I protested.

Taking Mr. Blake's arm, I followed my mother into the other room. Everybody was saying good-bye to Mrs. Van Amburgh; and the party was evidently breaking up. While I was waiting my turn to tell her what a lovely time I had had, Mr. Pumystone strolled up, and expressed the hope that my evening had been a pleasant one.

"Perfectly splendid," said I. "Are you going to Mrs. Van Rooster's on Friday?"

"Shall you be there, Miss Palmer?" said he.

"Yes, I expect to."

"In that case *je ne vis que pour ça*," and with a bow that he would himself have termed *resplendissant*, most brilliant, he wished me good-evening, and withdrew.

Mrs. Van Amburgh looked tired and sleepy, but she bade us good-bye very sweetly. I whispered to her daughter that the party had exceeded my wildest imaginings, and kissed her affectionately on the cheek. In spite of my rude behavior, I found Mr. Hill waiting in the entry to ask if he might get my carriage, a favor which I granted him, and then, after shaking hands with him and Mr. Blake, at the foot of the staircase, I went up to the dressing-room.

Emerging therefrom, five minutes later, in my nubia and snowy wraps, both these young men were very eager to secure the privilege of putting me into my carriage. Mr. Hill went out into the street, bare-headed, to look for it, and Mr. Blake remained in the vestibule, talking to me. Presently some one shouted that Miss Palmer's carriage was at the door, and although I had meant to take Mr. Hill's arm, since he had asked me first, I naturally

took Mr. Blake's, because he was close at hand. As I tripped down the steps, several familiar voices cried "Good-night," which I tried to return as sweetly as possible. Mr. Hill held the door of our carriage wide open, and helped Mamma and me in.

"Oh, you ought not to have come out without any thing on, Mr. Hill. You will surely catch cold," said I.

"Oh no, I shan't," said he; "good-night." And then he helped Papa in.

"Good-night, Mr. Hill. Good-night, Mr. Blake," I cried.

Just before the door of the carriage closed, Mr. Coney, shrouded in a comfortable-looking ulster, pressed forward, and shook my hand warmly. "Good-night," he murmured softly.

"Good-night, good-night," said I, and away the carriage rolled, while through the frosty pane I saw a half-dozen hats raised in air, and those who had no hats on scampering up the door-steps to escape from the cold.

"Well, Alice," said my father, "did any one speak to you?"

"Oh, Papa, I have had a perfectly glorious time. I never had such fun in my life," I cried, flinging myself back on the cushion.

"And who was the Prince in the fairy tale?" he continued.

"I don't understand you, Papa. I did n't see any Prince."

"Which of your slaves did you admire most, then, since you insist on my being literal?"

"Oh, I don't know; all of them were very nice."

"I was sorry to see, Alice," said Mamma, "that you seemed to fancy that Mr. Harry Coney. The Coneys were nobodies, ten years ago. Besides, he has the reputation of being an idle and dissipated young man, and a great flirt. It was he who is said to have broken poor Minnie Van Rooster's heart."

"Did he? Oh, how awful!" said I. "If I had known that, I would never have given him my *boutonnière*. But he seemed very gentlemanly, and talked in a most interesting way."

"I would rather see a daughter of mine in her coffin than have her marry a man like that," said Mamma, severely.

"You had better wait until he asks me, Mamma," I cried, with a pout.

"That was a nice-looking young man who danced the German with you," said Papa. "He had an intelligent, strong face. He is Mr. Murray Hill's son, I believe?"

"Yes, he was very kind," said I.

"I should say he was a very nice fellow. I thought he was much more attractive-looking than that other dyspeptic youth with the thin face, who kept hanging around you."

"What, Mr. Manhattan Blake?"

"Yes, that is his name, I believe."

"Oh, Papa, Mr. Blake was awfully nice, and I liked him ever so much better than Mr. Murray Hill. He has so much more interesting ideas of things. Mr. Hill is well enough, but he is dreadfully poky. One can always tell beforehand what he is going to say."

"Well, you may know best, but Mr. Blake looked to me like what is called a flat."

"Oh, Papa, he is very manly, I know; don't you think that he is, Mamma?"

"I hear," replied Mamma, "that he is quite an exceptional young man, æsthetic, and full of delightful tastes. How did you like Mr. Gerald Pumystone, Alice? Is n't he a charming fellow? So attractive, and with such good manners."

"I think he is too ridiculous for any thing, Mamma. It is rather good fun to talk to him, and he is not ugly, but he is such a goose. He positively stuffs compliments down one's throat."

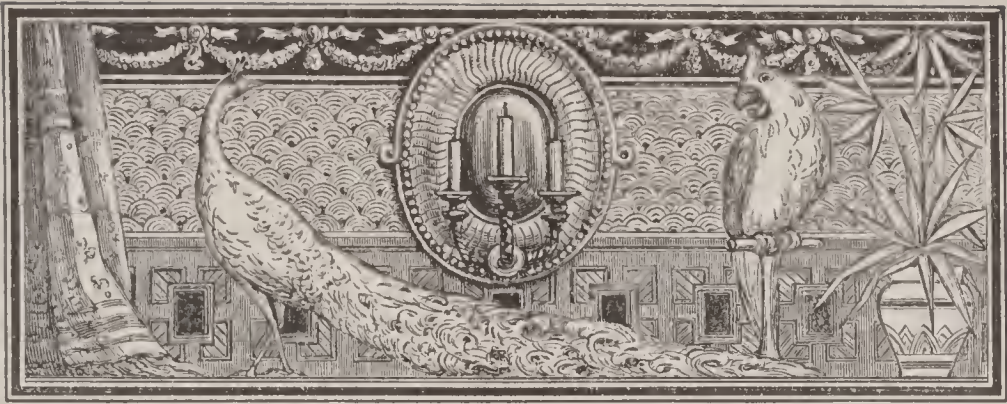
“Nonsense, child. You take things too much *au sérieux*. It is only his way. Everybody says that he is a delightful young man, and he is indubitably the most desirable *parti* in town.”

“I would n’t marry a man for money for any thing, Mamma,” said I, indignantly.

“As you yourself remarked, a moment ago, wait until he asks you, my dear,” replied Mamma.

On reaching the house, Mamma insisted on my taking a cup of *bouillon*, which had been left on a heater for me, and after drinking that, and putting my flowers in a cool place, so that they might look respectably on the morrow, I gathered up my wraps to go to my room. I felt that I should not be able to sleep, and I would have given worlds to have had Grace Irving to talk it all over with.

I said good night to Papa and Mamma, and dragged myself slowly up the stairs. “I wonder,” thought I, “if he really cared to have that rosebud. I think he does look a little bit like Kenelm Chillingly. How nice that Mr. Harry Coney was, too! I dare say it was all Minnie Van Rooster’s fault. She looks like a flirt herself.” And thus communing with myself, I went into my own room and shut the door.



II.

FASHIONABLE ÆSTHETICS.

ONCE fairly launched on the wave of society, my life for the next four months was one continuous whirl of gayety. Fortunately for me, the fashionable world approved of me almost unreservedly, and I was registered on the tablet of social statistics as a success. Dinners, balls, the opera, the sleigh-ride, followed one another in bewildering succession. Laden with flowers I went forth from the parental roof every evening, and returned to the parental roof, laden with flowers, very early every morning. Girl lunches in the forenoon and gentlemen callers at five-o'clock tea filled up the intervals in days far too short, even when most of the night was added to them, for the accomplishment of half that I desired.

I have heard that a man remains more or less callow until he is thirty, but I know from personal

experience that even as the dull-hued, commonplace chrysalis changes into the variegated butterfly, six weeks of commerce with the world will cause the tender bud to germinate into the gorgeous full-blown rose. Almost within the passing of a thought the guileless miss of yesterday is transformed into the iron-clad of modern society.

I know of nothing that will portray so graphically my impressions at this period as two extracts from my diary, written some six weeks after Mrs. Van Amburgh's ball. I append them just as they were written at the time, without alteration, save for the omission of a few passages which I do not feel at liberty to expose to the public eye.

FEBRUARY 3.

Yes, I recognize that I am metamorphosed, completely changed in the twinkling of an eye, as it were. But how changed, or metamorphosed into what, I cannot tell. I feel that even to myself I have become a charming, but inexplicable enigma; in my own eyes my simplest action, my every word, seems shrouded in solemn mystery. Ever and anon, a vague consciousness murmurs that the magician who has wrought this spell is man, two-legged man, — man, whom three short weeks ago I never thought of, save in the category with horses,

houses, and trees; thought of as their superior, it is true, because endowed with an immortal soul, but, like them, merely fragments of the political economy of the world, in which I sported an artless child. And now a subtle, Machiavelian instinct, fostered by tradition and the example and precepts of my entire sex, stirring in my bosom, whispers to me that the mainspring of a woman's life is man. But how? in what manner? "Marriage," Mamma says. But I don't want to be married, — at least not yet. I am perfectly happy at home, I have every thing in the world that I desire. Some of the girls talk of the delights of "settling down," but they are apt to be girls with only one string to their bow. I'm sure I don't care to settle down. The idea has no charms for my imagination. On the contrary, it is positively repulsive to me. Whom, to begin with, could I "settle down" with, if I wanted to? But if not by marriage, how then? There is the rub. I do not know. Sometimes, however, the thought steals over me, and I think that it may be actually the truth, that what I yearn for is friendship with man, — one or two real genuine men friends; men who will be willing to discuss interesting questions, give me their ideas on the problems of life, and tell me every thing about themselves. I don't know why it should be so,

but nothing is more enjoyable to me than to converse about love in the abstract with an attractive man. General admiration is very flattering to one's *amour propre*, of course, and all these beautiful flowers that I am constantly receiving are delightful as collaterals, so to speak, and I would not have them cease for any thing; but is not this perpetual German, this everlasting whirling over a polished floor with a formal society acquaintance whom one never gets to know any better, just a little bit unsatisfactory? It never seems to lead to any thing. I don't know what I would want it to lead to, but I should like to have it lead to *something*.

Speaking of men, I feel somehow that I am getting to know Mr. Murray Hill better every day. He is ever so much nicer than I ever thought he could be. He is entirely different from Mr. Manhattan Blake, of course, and it would be impossible to feel any particular thrill in talking with him, but his peculiarities are not nearly so noticeable as they were at first, and what he says is very interesting. Besides, it makes Mr. Blake perfectly wretched to see me with Mr. Hill. But that does not prove any thing, because melancholy is Mr. Blake's normal condition. I shall never forget the expression of gloom that came over his face the other evening, when he found Mr. Hill playing

duets with me in the music-room; as if I had n't the right to play with whomever I liked. I hope they won't take it into their heads to call on the same evening again, though. It was one of the ghastliest hours I ever passed. They were both of them as mum as statues, and I had to make all the "running," as the phrase is, myself.

By the way, what an absurd being that Gerald Pumystone is! I actually enjoy talking to him for the amusement I derive from his conceit. I don't believe that there is a more transparent, tactless individual in all New York, and yet he evidently considers himself, and is morally sure that we all consider him, a masterpiece of subtlety, wit, and fascination. No one denies, of course, that his family is very old, and all that, but I can't see why that should be a reason for speaking to girls as if one was conferring a personal favor on them. Why, he actually had the audacity to tell me, the other day, that there were only half a dozen girls in society whom he should feel himself justified in marrying, if he were a marrying man. Justified, indeed! I pity the future Mrs. Gerald with all my heart. But then, of course, he is very useful, and when he chooses can make a girl enjoy herself, because he has advantages in the way of horses and leisure time, that other men don't have; so it

would be foolish to be otherwise than on good terms with him. Mamma would like to have me marry him, I know. Poor Mamma!

I went to walk one afternoon last week with Mr. Manhattan Blake. We chose a street rather out of the beaten track, and had a most delightful discussion as to whether it was nicer to love or to be loved. Mr. Blake began by thinking that he would prefer to be loved, but I finally brought him over to the other side, on the ground that to love is so much more unselfish. What a strange, interesting man he is! He confided to me, to-day, that he did not believe any thing; that he had struggled hard to find some truth in the threadbare dogmas of Christianity, as he called them, but had hopelessly failed, and was now drifting slowly but surely, he feared, into the school of materialism (or some such horrid place, I think he said "materialism").

"What!" said I, "you don't believe in the Bible, Mr. Blake? How awful!"

"No, Miss Palmer, I can't accept things on trust, the way most men do. I am differently constituted. My class of mind refuses to recognize the existing order of things simply because they exist. The specious prattle of the nineteenth-century theologians has no more effect upon me, as ar-

gument, than water upon a duck's back. Their sentiments do great credit to their hearts, undoubtedly, and for a certain class of people instruction of that nature is still highly to be desired; but when it comes to asking *me* to accept their utterances as revealed religion, I smile, — a mournful smile, it is true, the smile of the iconoclast, who has nothing to suggest as a substitute, but still a smile."

"How dreadful, Mr. Blake! I have heard of atheists, but I never met one before," said I.

He smiled a sad smile, as if my words wounded him, and a look almost of suffering stole across his features, as he replied, "Taking my words in a narrow, literal sense, I undoubtedly deserve that harsh appellative, Miss Palmer; but I doubt, yes, I gravely doubt, whether I ought yet justly to be classed with those who utterly deny the existence of any theistic principle. Call me a groper if you will, style me even a materialistic sceptic, but the term atheist hardly describes my mode of thought. The expression is almost, if I may say so, too commonplace. A great many men are atheists. I know of but few who share my opinions, who sympathize with my ideas."

"What precisely are your ideas, Mr. Blake?"

"I fear that it would be impossible to make

them altogether intelligible to you, but I will try, perhaps, some day, — not now. My fervent hope is, you may never know the mental anguish that I have known, pass through the bitter experiences that I have undergone.” There were tears in his voice. He raised his hand as if to check the words of sympathy about to flow from my lips, and, lifting his hat (we were at my door), turned abruptly, and went down the street.

I wonder what the experiences that he referred to were. I would give any thing to know.

Mr. Murray Hill has been to see me a great deal lately, and he has sent me several beautiful baskets of flowers. Flowers are such pretty emblems of friendship. He spent yesterday afternoon here. I asked him if he liked the “Medical School,” and he discoursed for three-quarters of an hour on bones. He seems tremendously engrossed in his profession. I inquired, in order to appear interested, what a bone was made of; and he replied, as glibly as could be, “phosphate and carbonate of lime, phosphate of magnesia and ammonia, oxide of iron, oxide of manganese, a little alumina and silica, and some traces of gelatine, fat, and water.”

Only think of having to remember such things as that! I made him write it all down. I sup-

pose that it is awfully frivolous and unappreciative to feel so, but I do not enjoy bones as a topic of conversation. They make me feel creepy.

The last part of the time I got him talking about himself. He told me about his family, and which of them he liked best,—also some of their peculiarities. I should think he was a very kind-hearted, amiable man, and one cannot help respecting him immensely.

I cannot see why Mamma should object so much to poor Harry Coney. She declares that all he is after is my money, and that he is a horrid adventurer. I don't believe it; and I think it is a most humiliating idea to conclude that a man has designs simply because he is polite. I know, of course, that he has the reputation of being a little fast, and I dare say his life is devoid of any lofty purpose; but, as I am always on my guard, and if he says any thing at all *risqué*, show him plainly that I do not like it, I do not see the use of giving him the cold shoulder. Merely in a society way, he is the most fascinating man I ever met. His whispers are positively divine. I spent part of last evening with him, under the stairs, at Mrs. Gatling Gunn's; and just as I was in the seventh heaven, who should come up but Mr. Murray Hill, and ask me to waltz.

Of course I had to say "Yes," especially as he had sent me a lovely bouquet that evening; but I could have pounded him into little pieces for interrupting us.

The Hon. Hare Hare, an Englishman visiting this country, and staying at Mrs. Gatling Gunn's, was introduced to me, last week. I think that he has dreadful manners; but every one says that he is very much "the thing" in his own country.

FEBRUARY 15.

Lent will soon be at hand, and then good-by for this season to Germans and large balls. It is considered, however, perfectly correct to go to dinners, "teas," and *little* affairs during the holy period, and Mrs. Gatling Gunn assures me they are the pleasantest portion of society life. It may be so, but I feel certain that I shall sigh for the dear old waltz. I don't believe any dinner on earth could compare with my last German at the "Patriarchs'." I had a perfectly gorgeous time. I got eleven bouquets in the flower figure and nine "favors" in the favor figure; the favors being silver glove-buttoners with mother-of-pearl handles. I danced with Mr. Gatling Gunn, who was angelic.

The Gatling Gunns have taken me up lately. She is perfectly charming. Her maiden name

was Marshmellow, and her antecedents were not, I believe, particularly fashionable before Mr. Marshmellow made a great deal of money in something called a Bonanza. Her husband, Mr. Gatling Gunn, is of course in a social sense *crème de la crème*, and some people were surprised at his marrying giddy Birdie Marshmellow, as she was called. But she has now one of the most attractive establishments in New York, and everybody is wild to go to her *réunions*. Her sister, Peepy Marshmellow, who "came out" this winter, lives with her, and she, as well as Mrs. Gunn, seems to have taken a great fancy to me. Mamma rather turns up her nose at our intimacy, but acknowledges that one meets the nicest people in New York at her entertainments.

Mrs. Gunn is devoted to art among other things. Her rooms are furnished in exquisite taste, and abound in lovely pictures and embroideries and the dearest and oldest things in the pottery line. Her "holy of holies," as she terms her pet parlor, is lighted by seven *modérateur* lamps with tissue-paper shades, each of a different color, that hang down in long irregular points like icicles. She declares that the subdued tinged light that these produce is much preferable to gas. What a curious woman she is! I have never met such an entertaining person in my life, but when I overheard

Papa the other day, after dinner, say to Mr. Stonenger, that she was a "rattler," I felt there was a great deal of truth in the remark.

The manner in which she pronounces her name amuses me immensely. We happened to be sitting chatting in her boudoir a few days ago, and I asked her the reason of it. "My dear Alice," she replied, "you are behind the age. We call the trimming on this cloak 'skoonk;' why not then 'Gunn' 'Goon'?"

After that she went on to give me a lecture, as she called it. She insists that I am altogether too much of a little Goody Two Shoes, and am throwing myself away. "*Chic* is what you need," said she. "If a girl wants to be a genuine success, it is her duty to walk as if she were a great deal handsomer than she is, and then people will think her handsomer than she is. You are perfectly lovely, my dear, and there is in you the material for a masterpiece; but you will excuse me, I know, if I say that you walk and hold yourself twenty-five per cent 'off' your looks, instead of fifty per cent in advance as you ought to do. It is a failing indigenous to Boston girls, and *may* be an inheritance, for your dear Mamma was brought up in that strait, crooked little town. So it is not entirely your fault; but you must take pains to correct it."

“And then, too,” she continued, throwing over the back of the lounge on which she was reclining one graceful arm and hand, from which still hung pendent the French novel the perusal of which my advent had interrupted, and fixing her restless eyes intently upon my face, “you strike me as too innocent, — or say rather, my dear, too *ingénue*. The modest blush and the downcast eye become a girl charmingly for the first two weeks of her career, but after that period they are simply *gaucheries*. To *affect* the *ingénue* is quite another matter, and as different from what I refer to as champagne is from seltzer. As to its efficacy, tastes differ of course. Individually I never practise it. It does n’t suit my style of beauty. But that is neither here nor there. What I object to is the artlessness of nature. It may win you a husband, but society will shelve you.”

“But what would you have me do, Mrs. Gunn? You surely would not have me gush!” I exclaimed.

“Heaven forbid, my child. But there are other rôles than those of the Pussy-cat or the Chatterbox. O Alice, what would I not have given to have had as a girl your opportunities! My fame would have reached the stars. Only think of the disadvantages against which I have had to struggle! To begin

with, I was and always shall be vulgar, essentially vulgar. Don't contradict me, for I know perfectly well that it is so. I manage generally at this stage of the game to hide it pretty well, but upon occasions it crops out in spite of me. I recognize in my heart of hearts, my love, that by birth and education I am *roturière*. You have doubtless heard it whispered — it is a current scandal about town — that my father began life as a rag-picker. It is an audacious falsehood. The truth is, — you must never breathe it to any one, child, — he was for many years a butcher, and my earliest recollection of him is in a white apron with a cleaver in his hand. It used to be my delight as a little girl to stand beside the block in his shop, and watch him trim the meat for his customers. He made money — no matter how — while I was still young, and my mother, who was a sensible though ignorant woman, tried her best to make up for lost time in our education. You know the rest. I had genius, — I budded into rapid, giddy Birdie Marshmellow. I had ambition, — to-day I am the idol of the fashionable world, the clever Mrs. Gatling Gunn. But spite of my successes, my respected parent's beefsteaks and saddles of mutton still sully my mental visions, and I shall never forget, if I live to be one hundred, that these be-

jewelled fingers have been in contact with raw chops. I can see it in my sister, though, to tell the truth, she is worse than I have ever been. Compared with you, for instance, we are both of us iron pots beside a silver vase. If now you and I could but be moulded into one, what a consummate creature would be the outcome of the process! You have every thing that I lack, and I—of your future I do not despair, but at present I have something that you lack and without which you can never rule supreme over the fashionable world. Have you ever seen the *Cancan*, my dear? No, of course not. Well, it is a dance that one sees sometimes on the stage,—rather a naughty dance,—into which the performers throw themselves with such gusto and *abandon* that they seem to have merged every thing else in life in the pleasure of dancing like mad.

“Now, in order to become what is called in society a screaming success,—to become even a Mrs. Gatling Gunn,—one must, in figurative language, dance the *Cancan*, and dance it well too. I can dance it like a Parisienne, but then, you see, I am a *soupçon* vulgar. *Voilà* failure number one. You are refined, *spirituelle*, lovely; but you do not, or will not, or perhaps cannot dance the *Cancan*. *Voilà* failure number two. *Comprenez-vous, ma chérie?*”

With these last words Mrs. Gunn rose gayly from the lounge, and, gathering in her hand the train of the morning wrapper that clothed her graceful figure, executed for my edification a few steps of a fascinating *pas seul*, singing at the same time in a bewitching manner this little chanson from the French: —

“De la mère Angot j’ suis la fille,
 J’ suis la fille ;
 Et la fille Angot tient de famille,
 Tient de famille.
 Regardez moi,
 Regardez moi,
 La fille de la mère Angot.
 Regardez moi,
 Regardez moi,
 La fille de la mère Angot !”

“My dear child,” she cried, sinking back upon the sofa in a state of semi-exhaustion, “if your excellent Mamma knew that I had been putting such ideas into your head, she would have me boiled alive.”

I do not suppose that Mamma *would* be over-pleased, but there is a great deal of truth in what Mrs. Gunn says, after all. I understand perfectly what she means by saying that I walk twenty-five per cent “off” my looks. There is no use in being droopy, and I shall try to reform. What a fascinating woman she is! I verily believe she could

turn any one that she wished round her little finger. It must certainly be a very attractive life to be a leader in society. I think that I have at times experienced that Cancan feeling that she spoke of. I remember that when I was driving on Mr. Coming Gowing's drag one day last week with a lot of swell people, I was so carried away by excitement that I was conscious of being a great deal more of a success than usual. Still, the idea of settling down into a mere society woman is antagonistic to all my former views of life. This is a strange world.

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About three weeks subsequent to the date of this last extract from my diary, something happened which I knew that girls were liable to have happen to them, but which it had never entered my head would ever happen to me,—at least not for ever so long yet. Mr. Murray Hill asked me to become his wife. What induced him to I cannot imagine. I was awfully sorry, first, because of the great pain that my telling him I could n't evidently occasioned him, and then on account of the necessary interruption to our friendship, which had given me so much pleasure.

I had really grown to like him immensely, and he had told me so much about himself that I felt we

were quite intimate. I respected him ever so much, and valued his opinion as an opinion more than that of any young man of my acquaintance. I knew of course, if I ever thought about it at all, that he probably liked me well enough, because he seemed to enjoy coming to see me and sent me flowers and bonbons quite often; but I never imagined for a moment that he cared for me in *that* way. He never paid compliments nor made tender speeches, as some men who say that they admire me do, and although he sometimes talked very earnestly, it was always about something impersonal, which had no particular relation to me. He used to get me quite interested in his various plans and theories. Sometimes he would even ask my advice, or inquire how I would like to have him act in a certain case, which made me feel that he reposed confidence in me, which was very nice indeed.

Mamma chanced to say to me about a fortnight before it happened: "Isn't Mr. Hill becoming rather attentive, Alice? This is the third bouquet he has sent you this month."

"Nonsense, Mamma," I replied; "we are the best of friends, nothing more." But I took pains, nevertheless, to be a little cold the next two or three times we met, in order to be on the safe side. In the

face of this precautionary measure, what followed, needless to say, took me completely by surprise.

Mr. Hill had called upon me on each of the two days immediately preceding the eventful one, and we had had quite lengthy interviews. I had noticed at the time that he seemed abstracted and rather queer, and once it flashed across me, when he said something about having pressed a rosebud that I had given him in his favorite book of poetry, "Can it be possible that this man is in love with me?" But it was only a passing thought, to which I gave little heed. "He knows nothing about you at all. You have never told him any thing about yourself. It is too absurd. It cannot be," said I to myself.

Looking at it after it was all over, I could not discover that I had been to blame in any way. It was very unfortunate, very sad, and of course I felt terribly about it. If I had only known, if I could only have divined in any way the actual state of the case, I should have acted very differently and it need never have happened. But how could I have told? Mamma says that if young men send flowers to a girl they are supposed to be in earnest. However that may have been in her day, it is n't so now. I know of lots of girls who receive flowers continually from men who I am sure don't care a straw about them. The men have told me themselves that they did not care.

It took place in the evening. Mamma had gone out to dinner, and I was sitting alone in the parlor reading Wordsworth's "Laodamia," which Mr. Hill had lent to me. He came in with such a noiseless step that he was beside my sofa before I knew that he was in the room.

"Don't rise, I beg. What book are you reading?" said he confusedly, taking my hand and looking at me in a way that he had never done before.

It makes me draw in like a sea-anemone to have any one whom I don't like very, very much behave affectionately to me, and I replied as frigidly as was consistent with politeness, "Don't you recognize your book, Mr. Hill? I was just looking it over. Please sit down." And before he could take a seat beside me on the sofa I had slipped into a straight-backed chair.

I then perceived that he was rather more carefully dressed than usual. His white cravat was quite artistically tied, and he had had his hair cut. "You really look handsome to-night. Wherefore this magnificence?" thought I to myself.

We began to discuss the beauties of "Laodamia;" but Mr. Hill seemed so little at his ease and so peculiar that, divining with a woman's instinct that something was wrong, I tried to turn the con-

versation into a less dangerous channel by inquiring enthusiastically if he had seen the opera. This succeeded temporarily, but at the first pause he returned to the old theme.

“Don’t you think, Miss Alice,” said he, with another wistful, nervous glance that froze me, “that the idea of love as expressed in the closing speech of Protesilaus is a most exquisite one?”

“Yes, beautiful,” said I, although, as I had merely skimmed the poem, I had no notion what lines he referred to.

“So exalted, so ennobling. Let me repeat them to you,” he cried, bending toward me confidently.

‘Learn by a mortal yearning to ascend,
Seeking a higher object ; love was given,
Encouraged, sanctioned chiefly for this end :
For this the passion to excess was driven
That self might be annulled. Her bondage prove
The fetters of a dream opposed to love.’

I think, Miss Alice, that ‘Laodamia’ is one of the most beautiful poems that ever was written. It expresses exactly my views on such things. Don’t you think it very fine?”

“Oh, beautiful,” I replied faintly ; for although there was nothing especially alarming in his words, his voice was overflowing with suppressed tenderness, and just as the little birds foretell the coming

tornado by the deathlike stillness and the trembling of the leaves, his manner told me that something awful was going to happen. I began to quiver all over. There was a little pause. I stretched out my hand convulsively, as the drowning mariner clutches at a straw, for a photograph album upon the table, and undid the clasp. "Are you fond of photographs, Mr. Hill?" I queried.

"Very." And then he said, "Miss Alice, I want to say a few words to you. You will understand, I am sure, that I do not mean to offend you, but I must tell you how much I love you."

I had opened the album to show him some photographs, but as these words fell upon my ear, I felt myself beginning to tremble like a leaf. "It has got to come now," thought I, and with low-bent head, and eyes fixed upon the page, I awaited like a statue the bursting of the storm.

"You can have no conception, Miss Alice, how deeply, truly, how tenderly, I love you. Ever since I met you that evening at your first ball I have thought of nothing else but the possibility of making you my wife. Even before that, as a little girl, I had watched you with admiration. You seem to me to have finer qualities than any woman I have ever met, and I passionately adore you. Of course I cannot expect you to say now that you will marry me.

All I ask is that you will give me a little hope, — that you will allow me to think that you like me a little, and that there is a chance, a mere chance, that some day in the dim future, when I have shown myself worthy of you, you may consent to — to — O Miss Alice, I would try so hard to make your life a happy one. I would do every thing to gratify your slightest wish. It has ever been a cherished dream of mine to find some one whom I truly loved, and to devote myself to making for her a beautiful home. You are that woman, Alice, and — and will you not give me a little encouragement, — just one word?"

I had covered my face with my hands. I felt so awfully that I was afraid I should cry. All that I could find words to say was, "Oh, Mr. Hill, I am so sorry."

"I know I am not worthy of you," he went on, "but I am ambitious. I think I have abilities, and I would work, oh, so hard to make you proud of me."

"I am so sorry," moaned I.

"Perhaps you think I have been precipitate. You may want time, Miss Alice, to consider what I have said. Let me go, and give me an answer to-morrow, a month hence, or whenever you please."

I realized then that I must nerve myself, and make some reply to the unfortunate young man. I removed my hands from before my eyes, and, looking Mr. Hill in the face, spoke as tranquilly as I could: —

“I was so surprised, Mr. Hill, by what you have said that I did not know at first what to do. It was so unexpected. I have no feeling for you of the kind you mention. I have enjoyed our friendship immensely, but I never supposed for a moment that you felt toward me otherwise than as a friend. I like you of course very much, but only in the way I like a great many other people. I have never thought of being married, and — and I am very sure I could never feel towards you otherwise than I do now. Besides, you really know comparatively nothing about me, Mr. Hill. I have never talked to you about myself. I am very sorry to be obliged to cause you pain, but I trust you will never speak of such a thing to me again.”

I paused, and for a moment there was a dreadful silence. Poor Mr. Hill sat looking at the carpet with an expression on his face of intense sorrow. Presently he looked up, and said, “Miss Alice, is there absolutely no hope for me? Don’t you think it possible that time might make a difference?”

“I do not see how it could. Please try and forget me, Mr. Hill.”

“Is there any one else whom you like — excuse me for asking the question, but I mean is there any one — that is, does the fact that you like some one better than me prevent your liking me?”

Thoughts of Mr. Manhattan Blake flitted through my mind, but I replied, with perfect sincerity, that there was no one for whom I had any feeling as yet. “But I should much prefer, Mr. Hill, that you dismiss me entirely from your thoughts,” I added.

“It would be impossible,” said he.

There was another pause. We both sat looking at the carpet.

“Yes,” said I softly, after thinking for a few minutes. “I cannot see the slightest chance for you. I am very much obliged to you, but I must say ‘No,’ decisively. I respect you very much, Mr. Hill. I shall always feel a great interest in you, but — but please forget me.”

The poor fellow rose and gazed at me with the expression of a wounded animal. “O Miss Palmer,” said he in a tone that made my heart bleed, “I can never give you up. You are too much identified with my every thought for that to be possible. For the present all is over, but I shall not despair of the future.”

"There is no hope," said I, quietly but firmly. I felt that I owed it to him to be decided.

"Good-by," said he, putting out his hand and struggling bravely to restrain his emotion.

"Good-by, Mr. Hill. I hate to think that our pleasant friendship must end. Believe me I am very, very sorry for you."

"I suppose that I had better not come to see you any more at present," said he.

"Perhaps it would be best that you should not. Good-by."

He passed out of the room, and I remained standing where I was, motionless. I could hear him putting on his overcoat and arctics in the entry. Then followed a rapid stride, a slam of the front door, and he was gone. Falling into a chair, I covered my face with my hands and burst into tears.

I felt perfectly dreadfully. It had been so ghastly, so different from what I had supposed such a thing would be. I had always imagined that a proposal would be rather amusing, and had quite looked forward to one; for although I had never actually believed that men would absolutely go down on their knees, I had thought they always made a scene and were more or less peculiar. Mr. Hill, to be sure, had had his hair cut, and was dressed for the occasion (the remem-

brance of which made me shriek with laughter in the midst of my tears), but with that exception the whole thing had been fearfully sad and pathetic. I could not help thinking that he had never appeared so interesting before during all our acquaintance, and it occurred to me that if he had always been as nice as that he might have had some chance.

I wanted to tell people, of course, but I knew that it was out of the question. I felt that I was bound to let Mamma know the bare fact, so I told her, when she came home, that Mr. Hill would not visit the house any more, but omitted the details of the catastrophe.

“I am sorry, my dear,” said she; “he seemed like a very nice young man. What did you dislike about him?”

“Oh, I did n’t dislike him at all, Mamma, but somehow or other he is n’t interesting,” I replied.

Mamma sighed, but I do not believe that she minded my refusing him very much; for although he belonged to an excellent family, he had his own way to make in the world, to all intents and purposes, and I think it was Mamma’s secret wish that I should marry some one whose worldly possessions were large, so to speak. I slept very little that night, and for the next few days I was very misera-

ble. The whole affair was certainly very sad; but how could I have helped it, — in what way was I to blame?

One morning shortly after this occurrence, while I was still low in my mind, I received a visit from Mrs. Gatling Gunn. She informed me that she had come with the purpose of carrying into execution her plans for my reformation, and asked me to give her the pleasure of my company at her house the following week at a select little musical.

“I want you, *ma chérie*,” said she, “to get well acquainted with our set before you go to Newport, because we, in vulgar parlance, ‘run’ that charming watering-place.”

“I shall be delighted to come, Mrs. Gunn,” said I.

“It is to be very small,” she continued; “but, *entre nous*, everybody in town worth knowing will be there, — the Hon. Hare Hare, Mrs. Barnum Van Amburgh *et fille*, Coming Gowing, ‘Poodle’ Van Ulster, Lina Van Rooster, — what a little mouse she is; it can be safely said, nobody will break her heart in the way her sister’s was broken, — dear Harry Coney, young Gerald Pumystone, Mamie Hatche, Pussy Baiker, Lou and Stylington Ribblehurst, little Chicky Chalmers, and just a few others.”

“ Oh, how nice, Mrs. Gunn ! ”

“ A little music, you know, and a quiet chit-chat. There you have the programme. You will come ? ”

“ With pleasure.”

“ *A la bonne heure.* But what are these stories I hear about you, my love? *On dit* that you have mercilessly thrown over the scion of a haughty house, broken the heart of a God-fearing young man, — in short, declined to become Mrs. Murray Hill, Jr. I can see by your face that it is true, — what a sly minx it is! You might have made me a *confidante*, I think.”

“ What *do* you mean, Mrs. Gunn ? ” I protested ; but I could feel that my cheeks were flaming, and I knew, from the smile that played about Mrs. Gunn’s lips, that my secret was out.

“ Quite a feather in your cap, my dear,” she continued, without regarding my feeble equivocation. “ Much better than to have accepted him. He is a worthy young man, I dare say, but dull, and if he lived to be a hundred would never learn how to enter a room properly. He may end by being famous if he lasts long enough, but at the best it is not a wildly seductive prospect to become the gray-haired wife of a famous man. How did he take it, dear? Did he call you a flirt ? ”

“A flirt? No, he never would have said such a thing. Why should he have?”

“Oh, they sometimes *do*. There is no accounting for men’s idiosyncrasies. An ardent spirit is very apt to consider any thing short of icy coldness encouragement. My second admirer told me, I remember, that I was a heartless jilt because I looked more or less happy when he sent me flowers. Poor Teddy Harrison! He has never married, and regards our sex, it is said, as fiends incarnate. What would he have had me do, — pout and turn my back upon him because he brought me a rose? Bah! I have no patience with the humors of our so-called masters. So he bore it like a lamb, did he? Charming, unless he is of the persevering kind. A persevering man is the most insidious foe in the pathway of woman. Statistics show that continual dropping will wear away the stone of six feminine hearts out of seven. Three at least, of my intimate friends, dear, married their husbands to get rid of them.”

“I don’t think that there is any danger in my case, Mrs. Gunn,” said I, laughing.

“*Nous verrons*,” she exclaimed with a sigh. “By the by, Alice,” she added, a moment after, “Harry Coney is decidedly *épris* of you, — he raved about you to me for an hour the other day at the Ribble-

hursts'. He is charming, but the dear creature has n't a shilling to his name, so it would n't do. But for any thing on this side of the altar he is simply heavenly. Provided you are discreet enough never to name the day, you can make yourself the envy of all New York. Good-by, dear. Don't forget next Wednesday." And, throwing a kiss at me from the tips of her fingers, she tripped gracefully out of the room.

The following Wednesday Mamma and I went to the "musical." I had an extremely entertaining time. There were about seventy-five people there, chiefly of the ultra-fashionable set, with a sprinkling of literary and artistic lions. We were late, as usual, and as we entered the room, a foreign-looking person, who Mrs. Gunn afterwards told me was Professor Wiener, a semi-professional, was playing the piano. The rest of the company were seated in clusters about the exquisite parlors. Notwithstanding the music, conversation was going on in a minor key, and from among the palm-leaves in the dimly lighted conservatory came sounds of muffled flirtation.

Our hostess, attired in black satin cut away in front over old gold-colored brocade, rushed forward to greet us. "So kind of you to come," she whispered; and everybody of course stared at us,

as they made room for us to pass, and those who wore eye-glasses gave us the benefit of them. I sat down close to Mamma, in a beautiful upholstered chair of a color of which I was ignorant of the name. At my side stood a little low plush-covered table, resting on three legs, uniting in a wooden sphere at the base, upon which were collected a multitude of china creatures, principally dogs, of all hues and sizes. On a divan beyond, lovely Mrs. Stylington Ribblehurst, in a delicate rose-tinted skeleton of a dress, sat chatting confidentially with Coming Gowing, the bachelor *par excellence* of society, who, rumor says, never talks to any one whose income is under twenty-five thousand a year.

“Do you know,” I overheard him whisper to the fair charmer, “that she positively starves her servants? *On dit* that she obliges them to divide with her the gratuities that visitors at her house give them.”

“Really? You don’t mean so,” was the delighted response, the remainder of which was drowned in the *fortissimo* of Professor Wiener.

Behind me, in a nook dimly illumined from a bracket above by a *modérateur* lamp in the form of a polar bear rampant, the rays of which were filtered through a dark carnation-paper shade,

Mr. "Poodle" Van Ulster, so nicknamed because of the silkiness of his hair and whiskers, and a certain namby-pamby way he has of talking, was discussing art with Mrs. Barnum Van Amburgh. Mr. Van Ulster is considered one of the nicest young married men in New York, and is extremely æsthetic.

They were examining a small painting by Corot, that Mrs. Gunn had recently purchased for a large sum; and as I knew them both, I pushed back my chair slightly, so as to be able to join the conversation.

"An exquisite bit, — a perfect gem," said "Poodle," holding it out at arm's-length with a seraphic look in his eyes. "The tenderness of those grays is tantalizing. Oh, excellent, — excellent. There is nothing, after all, equal to Corot at his best."

"Nothing," echoed Mrs. Van Amburgh, whose knowledge of art was, I had reason to believe, limited.

"Observe," continued the male critic, with head on one side and squinting musingly at the canvas, "the splendor of motion and delightful vigor of the whole."

"Such luxury of color, too," ventured Mrs. Van Amburgh.

"Yes," continued he; "and the wealth of im-

agery displayed is something overpowering. In the mere technique there may perhaps be flaws; there is a dreamy sketchiness about the outlines, which, while it is entirely intelligible to me, and palsies with despair one's hopes of ever rivalling such genius, might possibly suggest to the ignorant or even to the hypercritical student of modern art that the signification — no, not the signification precisely — that the — or rather that it does not convey — that, in a word, it is not exactly clear that it was meant to be what it is."

"I agree with you entirely, Mr. Van Ulster; that very same idea occurred to me," said Mrs. Van Amburgh effusively.

"I am afraid that I do not make my meaning wholly intelligible; it is extremely difficult not to use terms strictly technical," said he.

"Oh, perfectly, perfectly, — I understand exactly," protested Mrs. Van. "A gem, Alice, isn't it?" she continued, turning to me.

"Yes, perfectly lovely, Mrs. Van Amburgh," said I hypocritically; for, to tell the truth, I could n't make out what the picture was about. To salve my conscience, however, I added, "What is that in the background which looks something like a gaudy smutch?"

I saw a sad smile flit across Mr. Van Ulster's

features as he drawled in reply, "That is a tree, Miss Palmer."

"But where are the leaves, Mr. Van Ulster?" said I, determined not to be put down in this way.

"Miss Palmer," said he almost contemptuously, "it is one of the requisites of the modern school of painting that the leaves of a tree should be buried in the *tout ensemble*. If now you were to stand at the farther end of the room and gaze at this charming subject, you would discern the foliage in question in much the same way as one sees trees in a distant landscape. To have inserted leaves or to have made on the canvas any thing beyond that which you have styled a smutch would have been, so to speak, artistic tautology, — pictorial pleonasm."

"Oh yes, I see, Mr. Van Ulster. The modern school of painting evidently has in view the possibilities of our presently being able to see pictures by telephone. How charming!"

Mr. Van Ulster looked at me as if he thought I must be a little daft, and, the music having just then ceased, he asked Mrs. Van Amburgh to stroll through the rooms with him to examine the *objets de vertu*.

As they were walking away I found myself face

to face with an insignificant, rather common-looking little creature, with bleary gray eyes, and reddish brown whiskers and mustache, whom I recognized as the Hon. Hare Hare, the Englishman whom Mrs. Gunn had spoken of at our last interview. He had been introduced to me on a previous occasion at this same house. He had not prepossessed me then, I must say, in his favor, for many of his remarks were very rude, and he showed plainly by his manner that he considered himself under no obligation to behave as he would have done presumably at home. It was a kettle-drum, I remember, and all the other men wore black frock-coats, but the Hon. Hare Hare had appeared in a rough gray suit and untidy cravat. To-night, however, he was suitably apparelled, and excepting that ease of manner evidently formed no part of his charms, he revealed to the ordinary eye no other peculiarity. I have heard a great many people say that Englishmen have been made so much of in our society that they consider it rather clever to return courtesy with rudeness.

He had been all the rage for the past two months. Mrs. Gunn and Mrs. Ribblehurst had taken him up at Newport the preceding summer, and he had been fêted, lionized, and worshipped to

his heart's content. So far as I could learn, none of the girls liked him, nor thought him agreeable: but as it was decidedly the "thing" to have him around, he was invited everywhere. He was first cousin to the Earl of Hammerhead, a nobleman who, it is said, lost a great deal of money by dabbling in American securities,—I believe in the Joanna mine or some such thing (it may not have been Joanna, but I know that it was a girl's name). The Hon. Hare Hare had come out to this country to investigate the matter as well as amuse himself; and as, owing to the health of the heir apparent, the chances were more than even in favor of his becoming some day Earl of Hammerhead himself, some of the girls' mothers (notably Mamie Hatche's) were anxious to have their daughters return with him to England as prospective Countess of Hammerhead. "I would not touch him with the tongs," had been Mamma's remark when I told her of Mrs. Hatche's manœuvres. But I must own I felt more or less satisfaction at seeing him now standing before me.

"How d' you do, Miss Palmer? Awfully jolly, is n't it? What's in that place over there?" exclaimed he, pointing to the conservatory at the end of the suite of rooms. He put out his arm, as if to signify that I was to investigate the mystery

with him; and, rather amused than otherwise, I responded to his dumb show, and suffered myself to be dragged through the intervening parlors.

“What a beastly bore! I’d smash ’em if I had ’em,” he remarked sympathetically, when, in endeavoring to thread my way through the maze of knick-knacks that adorned Mrs. Gunn’s “holy of holies” (which was the further room of the two), I caught my foot against an unexpected seal-skin footstool, and, losing my balance, upset a love of a little table shaped like a mushroom.

The conservatory, in which there were a few foreign-looking trees and plants, was hung with Chinese lanterns that were very effective. In the middle was a pretty little fountain representing Danae and the shower of gold. Comfortable, odd-shaped seats were scattered about in the nooks and corners. As we entered, several couples were apparently having desperate flirtations. I identified Pussy Baiker and Mr. Gerald Pumystone, Lina Van Rooster and Mr. Chicky Chalmers, and a voice from underneath an india-rubber tree in a dim recess, which it was easy to recognize as Peepy Marshmellow’s, called out, “Come over here, Alice; there’s lots of room.”

Obeying the summons, I found Peepy sunk in the depths of a huge arm-chair, and Mr. Harry

Coney on an ottoman at her feet. The former seemed to be entirely regardless of the fact that her position was likely to be extremely detrimental to the skirt of the striking black tulle trimmed with sunflowers in which she was arrayed (she was going to a ball at Mrs. Wellman Heidseck's later in the evening), and a bit of a leaf which she had pulled off the rubber-tree protruded from between her cherry lips.

"Well, Alice, my love, how long you have been in finding your way to our hermitage!" she exclaimed. "How d' y' do, Mr. Hare?"

"And how is the lovely Miss Marshmellow this evening?" replied the latter, bowing with mock reverence to this easy-going beauty.

"Ta, awfully ta. That is what your countrywomen would say under similar circumstances, is n't it? Why have n't you been to see me, Hon. Hare Hare? I waited at home all yesterday afternoon, expecting that you would come."

"And I did n't. What a joke!" exclaimed the fascinating foreigner with a laugh.

"You shan't make fun of me; I'll never speak to you again, you nasty thing. That's a real English expression now, is n't it, and perfectly good form, too," said Peepy.

"Oh, yes," said the Hon. Hare Hare, and he

added, "This is a curious outfit, isn't it? We should call it at home a rum go."

"Perhaps you are not aware that it is my sister who is giving this 'outfit,' or 'go,' whichever you prefer to call it," said she.

"Oh, really now, is *that so*? How embarrassing! But a fellow can't for the life of him keep your relationships in his head in this country," replied Mr. Hare, with the most amazing brass I had ever witnessed.

"How agonizingly repulsive!" cried Peepy, who, though bound to be offended, was evidently very much amused. "Is that the way all Englishmen talk?"

Mr. Hare's reply was cut short by the appearance of a servant at the door of the conservatory with the announcement that supper was ready.

"I'm frantically glad," cried Peepy, clapping her hands together. "I feel quite starved. Let's have supper on this table," pointing, as she spoke, to an ormolu table close at hand. During the foregoing dialogue Mr. Coney and I had been amused but silent spectators, but the former now rose and moved the table so that our quartette could sit around it.

"Now mind and bring me something nice, Hon. Hare Hare," continued Peepy, "and don't forget

a glass of champagne. Be sure and put lots of seltzer in it. The last time you brought me champagne it was awfully strong, and my sister gave me a dreadful scolding because I drank it."

By the time that Mr. Coney and Mr. Hare returned with our supper, we were holding quite a levee. Man after man, attracted at first doubtless by a spirit of curiosity, had dropped into the conservatory, and, discovering our retreat beside the rubber-tree, remained to chat. Peepy was evidently in her element, and simply irrepressible. Disgusted as I was at the tenor of her conversation, I could not but admire the executive ability she revealed in fixing the attention of six men all at once, and coming off victorious in every attempt at badinage. Our partners brought back with them a bottle of champagne and one of seltzer, which they placed upon our table.

"You don't expect I am going to drink all that, do you, Hon. Hare Hare?" cried Peepy.

"I knew, Miss Marshmellow, that if I brought you merely one glass I should be sent back again in five minutes," replied the audacious Englishman.

"How hideously disagreeable!" cried she. "I have half a mind to drink the whole of it in order to make you go back for more, you lazy thing!"

All the men haw-hawed, and Peepy proceeded to sip a glass of the mixture which Mr. Coney had prepared for her. I was annoyed to see that he deliberately filled her glass with champagne, and poured in only a few drops of the Apollinaris water. I could not help being struck with the free-and-easy manner that the men who stood around us began to adopt towards her. What they said was intended presumably for banter, but absence of respect was noticeable in their every word and gesture. Realizing that matters were growing a little too rapid for my taste, I asked Mr. Coney, who had seated himself beside me, to take me into the other room.

"Where are you going, Alice?" exclaimed Peepy, as I rose from my seat.

"Merely into the other room. It is very warm here," said I, a trifle haughtily.

A slight blush suffused her face. She evidently appreciated that I did not approve of her behavior. "Do I shock you dreadfully, dear?" she cried with a little laugh. "Well, I will go too, and be awfully proper for the rest of the evening. It must be nearly time for Mrs. Wellman Heidseck's. Which of you," turning gayly to the group of men around her, "will take me into the other room?"

A dozen arms were proffered immediately, and,

selecting that of Mr. Chicky Chalmers, she followed me out of the conservatory.

We found the appearance of the parlors very much altered. Earlier in the evening they had been comfortably crowded with people listening to Professor Wiener and the ballad-singer, Mrs. Coventry (*née* Chambers, my old music-teacher), who had followed the Professor. But now the superfluous men were audibly in the supper-room, and the ladies were scattered about in nooks and corners, with men who admired them particularly, all over the house, which had been thrown open practically from attic to cellar. Re-entering the room where I had passed the first part of the evening, I noticed that Coming Gowing and Mrs. Stylington Ribblehurst were still sitting on the same divan absorbed in apparently confidential conversation. Perhaps it is only fair to state that just as we were leaving the conservatory I had noticed Mr. Ribblehurst enter it with Mrs. Gunn on his arm.

“Let us sit down here,” said Mr. Coney, pausing in our sauntering before a little retreat behind some heavy drapery curtains in the “holy of holies.” I accepted the situation, and remained there undisturbed, listening to his dulcet tones, until ferreted out by Mamma almost an hour later. I shall never forget the excitement, the intensity, of that

tête-à-tête. I had always thought Harry Coney fascinating, but on this night it seemed to me as if his soul was in his mouth, and that every word as it came forth from his lips was angel-coined. It was not in what he said but in his manner of saying it that his peculiar charm lay. He did not commit himself in express terms to the extent that some men do, but I felt that he intended by his every gesture to convey the impression that he adored me and worshipped the ground I trod upon. At the same time I was conscious to a certain extent that the influence he had over me was more or less akin to the spell the cat casts over the innocent bird before she devours it. I knew instinctively that I ought not to like him, and yet I knew that I did like him very much in spite of myself. Even as he talked I compared him in my mind with Mr. Manhattan Blake, and the balance seemed to tremble in favor of "dear Harry," as Mrs. Gunn called him. I asked him several questions about himself, but the subject interested him but little. He seemed to prefer to talk about me. As we were leaving our retreat, I inquired of him why he had so wickedly filled Peepy's glass with champagne. He looked at me for a moment without replying, and I thought I saw a shadow of a smile lurking under his mus-

tache. Then, with a look of apparent contrition in his dark eyes, he pressed my hand a little, and said earnestly, "It was wrong of me, Miss Palmer. Believe me, I am very sorry."

As I came up on his arm to say good-night to Mrs. Gunn, she whispered in my ear, "I see, Alice, that you are following my advice. But be careful, dear; he is no chicken."

"I am afraid, though, that I am," said I. "Good-night, Mrs. Gunn."



III.

MR. MANHATTAN BLAKE.

THE debilitating weather incident to the approach of spring inclined my thoughts to rest and pensive retrospect. All dissipation was over for the present, and as I felt, physically speaking, limp, my principal occupation during the six weeks that preceded our moving to Newport was to lie upon the sofa and analyze myself, or saunter in the sunshine of Fifth Avenue with Grace Irving. I rather wanted to take a little trip to Florida, but Mamma decided that absolute repose was the best thing for me.

People who were fond of me but had not much tact, and girls who disapproved of me, declared I looked pale and worn-out. Of course I stoutly asserted that I was perfectly well. But it was not very agreeable to have such a thing said to one, and I used to examine my cheek-bones and

other salient features every morning in my mirror with considerable solicitude. I arrived, however, finally at the conclusion that, on the whole, my face was more interesting-looking now that its contour lacked a little of its habitual plumpness. I should, at any rate, no longer be exposed to that invidious compliment, "a fine healthy girl."

Looking back on my "first winter," I could say, without a shadow of presumption, that I had been a success. I had won the good opinion of both the conservative and radical portions of society. I had been just fast enough (to quote the ill-natured remark of a girl who does not like me much) to escape disagreeable strictures on the score of either prudery or rapidity. I had avoided extremes, and my admirers embraced every element of the social world. Suddenly translated from a girl into a woman, I had learned, as has been already hinted, to appreciate the omnipotence of man. I felt my brain still giddy from the accession of a thousand new ideas: all my views of life had been revolutionized, the pet visions and dreams of childhood had burst like bubbles, my long-cherished ideals had come down two or three pegs; but I had had a perfectly gorgeous time.

It is a popular theory that a covert tenderness for some one of the opposite sex is the guiding

impulse of every young girl's life. This is very likely the case in provincial communities, or among girls who fail to excite enthusiasm in society. But I know that so far as I myself or any of the more prominent *débutantes* were concerned, our one absorbing passion was love of admiration.

A perfectly gorgeous time consisted in getting, for instance, nine bouquets in the German when another girl got but three. Not, as cynical people will say, because it gave me satisfaction that the other girl received so few, but because of the bare fact that I got more than she did; thereby (to use a bit of slang) getting points on her for the time being. So far from rejoicing at her poverty, the more flowers another girl got, the more genuine pleasure I had, provided always there was a good wide margin in my favor between us. On the other hand, a ghastly time was synonymous with neglect in the presence of our contemporaries; and the circumstance that some one for whom I felt a latent partiality tried, by his single devotion to me all the evening, to atone for the indifference of others, rather increased the smart than otherwise; for while more or less flattered by the ardor of my slave, I could not but feel annoyed that he, of all others, should have been a witness of my humiliation. This may sound like sophis-

try; but the idea I wish to convey is that we girls craved during our first winter the tempered admiration of the many rather than the passionate fervor of the few. We felt it politic and necessary, for ambition's sake, to disregard personal inclinations, and sometimes sacrifice, for the transient worship of numbers, *tête-à-têtes* in corners with those whom we suspected of entertaining serious intentions. I have heard it stated that men invariably go to parties to see some particular girl, but I can safely say that up to this period I had not been dependent for my enjoyment on the presence of any one in especial. Of course I always noticed and felt a certain thrill when persons like Harry Coney or Manhattan Blake entered the room, but I often enjoyed myself fully as much on the evenings that they happened to be absent.

But now that the season was over, and I felt able to tone down the rapid gait of the past three months into a more dignified pace, I began, like a prudent general after a brilliant victory, to analyze carefully the situation. The Murray Hill tragedy had opened my eyes to the fact that it was perfectly possible for young men to fall in love with me, a reality which I had hitherto regarded as chimerical; and I was now prompted by certain indefinable sensations within me, which I could not

fully explain, to revolve, in the solitude of my chamber, whether it was possible that I could ever fall in love with any man.

From casual remarks, and from what Grace Irving had confided to me that other girls had told her, I had gathered that my name was prominently mentioned in connection with four young men in society. Current Rumor, when most rampantly asserting herself, had it that I had played fast and loose with Mr. Hill, had tried unsuccessfully to hook Mr. Gerald Pumystone, was pining with love for Manhattan Blake, and that Harry Coney, under the guise of a *cavaliere servente*, was making a dead set for my fortune. All that was true in this sensational tirade was that I had mildly but firmly refused an unexpected offer of marriage from Mr. Hill, and that the three other young men were in the habit of speaking to me more frequently than the rest of my male acquaintance. Beyond this and beyond the fact that I liked ever so much to have them all four come and see me separately as often as they would, and that occasionally I was conscious of little thrills of excitement going through me when I talked with Mr. Blake or Mr. Coney, I had really never taken the trouble to investigate what was the exact nature of my feelings towards them.

But now, while during the early days of spring I ruminated upon the sofa, reposing against its cushions the small of my back, this quartette used frequently to rise before me like ghosts, sad and woe-begone, and murmur plaintively, "Which of us, gentle maiden, — which of us?" My mind, it is true, was running on apparitions at the time, for a number of us girls were spending our spare hours in reading "Macbeth" and "Hamlet" under the supervision of a deserving Miss Driggs. Sometimes for amusement's sake, I would imagine myself during the spectral interviews the wife of each of the four in turn, and a still small voice would whisper in my ear, "Remember, Alice, that the Pumystones antedate Noah, and that for the future you would never have to inquire the price of things. Gerald is a very nice young man. His clothes fit him to perfection. You would not be obliged to see *very* much of him. He looks remarkably well in public, and you could always feel sure of his doing the correct thing upon a social emergency. He owns a dog-cart and a drag, and would undoubtedly allow you a phaeton and ponies, rat size. You could skip over to Europe whenever you wished. Mamma would be pleased as Punch. You could 'run' society, and life would be as soft as sealskin."

"True," would be my mournful reply, "but he

does n't amount to a row of pins." Whereupon suitor number one would vanish from the scene, and perhaps the face of Murray Hill, wearing the wounded-animal expression it wore upon that eventful evening, would rise, Banquo-like, before me. Poor Mr. Hill! We had met several times since our *contretemps*, and although a little sad and reserved, his demeanor had been singularly amiable and forgiving. I had been of course wild with excitement to see how he would act at our first interview, and I scarcely knew whether I was pleased or not when he came up and said, just as usual, "Good evening, Miss Palmer." And now, thought I, if I were to relent and marry him, what a nice, sensible match everybody would consider it! The Murray Hills are among the landmarks of society, and, what is more, I should be the wife of an amiable, God-fearing man. He would be sure to do everything possible to secure my happiness and make my home ideal. I could go straight to heaven without change of cars. "But reflect upon the other side of the picture," whispered my critical genius. "The Murray Hills are comfortably off, nothing more. To live with the old people would be misery, so you would probably take a pretty little house on a side street, which your own Papa would give you as a wedding-present, and a

young physician's income would be your future financial basis. That is, you would settle down. Everybody in society would call on you once, and then you would be shelved. In other words, people would henceforth merely invite you to general jams, and send you cards when their children were married. You would become a discreet, demure, motherly sort of person. Your evenings would be spent in darning stockings or playing solitaire in a little low chair at your husband's feet. He would be toiling over musty volumes by the light of a student-lamp, with a green-paper shade over his eyes. Once in a while he would look up from his work to bestow a smile or a word upon you, which you would learn to look forward to as a pet animal does to a lump of sugar. Occasionally, if you had been particularly good, he would take you to the play, or read aloud to you, as a treat, the last biography, or his favorite bits of Shakspeare."

"Don't, don't!" I would invariably cry at this juncture, with my hands over my eyes. "Take him away, take him away! I should die in a week."

So, in like manner, the features of the fascinating Harry Coney would succeed Murray Hill's, and I would imagine myself married to the charming creature, and living at Papa's expense in some

artistic little dove-cot. It was a pleasant fancy, and I used to linger over it. But ever and anon a presentiment would come over me that I, like the guileless maiden who wedded the captivating Blue-beard, would some day be forced to seek the housetop and cry aloud for Sister Anna, if I chose this man for my mate. Frivolous as I was, I really think, it was inherent poise of character that prevented me from seriously fancying Mr. Coney. All that was bad in me he pleased, and I realized that an evening with him had very much the same effect upon me as a highly sensational melodrama. Intercourse with him was dissipation, and in seeking to drive his image from my thoughts, I imagine that I underwent the sensations that animate the convert to temperance who puts from him the alluring cup of destruction.

It may perhaps also have been the unconscious influence of my fourth admirer that prevented me from becoming too fond of "dear Harry." To be perfectly frank, I suppose that at this time, away down in the depths of my heart, I harbored for Mr. Blake a little bit of that feeling which it is the ambition of man to inspire in our sex. I felt myself blushing when the other girls teased me about him. When people asked me who talked to me at a party, I was apt to detect myself enumerating

him last in the category, as if desirous that he should pass unnoticed. Sometimes, without consciously meaning to do so, I found myself strolling on Fifth Avenue at the time that he habitually came up town. It was he who had sent me my first bouquet. It was with him I had first discussed problems of life, and had my earliest "interesting conversation." Struggle as I would, I could not rid myself of the gentle pressure of this chain. That I did not care for him much I was certain, but with chagrin I felt that to myself I must acknowledge that if the secrets of my bosom should be laid bare, among them would be discovered a sneaking affection for Mr. Manhattan Blake. Love of admiration, it is true, had absorbed my being, but through the marble of my heart this slender vein of romance had stolen its golden way.

It was a most humiliating discovery, and as Mr. Blake began to come to see me even more frequently than during the gay season, it seemed as if fate had conspired against me. I was angry with myself for liking to have him come and looking forward to his visits. It was dreadful to be conscious that my fancy was no longer free, and that my maiden pride tacitly bowed down to him as a positive possibility. Womanlike, I had always regarded the young unmarried men of my acquaint-

ance in the light of possibilities, but *negative* possibilities. Mr. Blake had become something more than that. I felt sure that if he should chance to ask me, some soft spring afternoon, during a *tête-à-tête* in the parlor, or while strolling in the Park, "Do you love me, Alice?" my answer would be, "No;" but I could not feel equally certain that it would not be a timid No, a faltering No, a No very different from the one I gave poor Mr. Hill.

To seek to explain why a person of one sex in this world falls in love with, or, to use a less conventional but less compromising expression, is smashed upon a particular individual belonging to the other, is generally a hopeless task, and I am sure that I cannot analyze the reason of my preference for Mr. Blake. I was aware that many of the girls laughed at him, and called him peculiar and poky; that others considered him too unconventional; and that one girl had nicknamed him "the hearse," on account of his habitual pensive melancholy. But to me all these animadversions seemed unjust. He was different from other men, to be sure. To begin with, he had low spirits, and I imagine that the things he ate did not agree with him very well; but once start him on books or any subject in which he was interested, and he often became simply intense. Perhaps the expression "weird," applied to him

by Grace Irving, described him more accurately than any other.

He had a delicious way of talking about himself under the guise of an imaginary person, thereby confiding to you all his secret feelings without appearing to do so; you knowing all the while that the man of straw was Manhattan Blake, and that he knew that you knew that such was the case. He would often sit with me for a whole afternoon thus discussing and analyzing this second self. Sometimes, when during these quasi *séances* his voice sank very low, and he became morbid and dejected-looking, the process would remind me of the witches of long ago who used to make wax figures of their enemies and torture them with pins over a slow fire.

It was noticeable, however, that the characteristics of this other self of his were continually changing, and were rarely consistent for more than a week at a time. This puzzled me until I discovered that the views of Mr. Blake's double were largely dependent upon what Mr. Blake happened to be reading at the time. I ventured once to tax him with this seeming blemish, but his reply reassured me. He said that the opinions of every thinking man were continually undergoing revolution, and that "consistency is the vice of fools."

Among other things, he had a fascinating habit of summing up life in some epigram usually borrowed from the poets. For some time after having become familiar with the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, a charming translation from the Persian, I remember that he used on every available opportunity to croon in my ears, as expressive of his theory of existence, the lines: —

“Come fill the cup, and in the fire of spring
Your winter garment of repentance fling.
The bird of time has but a little way
To flutter, — and the bird is on the wing.

“Ah, my beloved, fill the cup that clears
To-day of past regrets and future fears :
To-morrow ! — why, to-morrow I may be
Myself with yesterday’s seven thousand years.

“Perplexed no more with human or divine,
To-morrow’s tangle to the winds resign,
And lose your fingers in the tresses of
The cypress-slender minister of wine.

“Waste not your hour, nor in the vain pursuit
Of this and that, endeavor and dispute.
Better be jocund with the fruitful grape
Than sadden after none, or bitter, fruit.”

When the lovely “Epic of Hades” came out, Mr. Blake took a great fancy to the poem “Marsyas,” which portrays the trials of a poor creature who was flayed alive in ancient times for trying

to rival Apollo in playing on the flute. The unlucky wretch is represented, in this modern interpretation of his story, as consoling himself with the reflection

“ How far high failure overleaps the bound
Of low successes ; ”

that it was better to be a second-class performer than none at all, and thanking his stars that he was able to appreciate classical music when he heard it. I may have jumbled things up a little, for I am not a very good hand at analyzing poetry ; but I can still picture to myself that spring afternoon in the parlor, and Mr. Blake, with his thin pale face and large mysterious eyes, bending towards me after reading the poem aloud, and exclaiming, “ How exquisite, Miss Palmer, is it not? I can imagine so many people ” (meaning himself) “ just like Maryas,—so many people in the world who have everything but the power of expression, and who, to quote the words of another poet, ‘ die with all their music in them,’ so ‘ to speak. Only think, though, what an advantage these artists, mediocre as they are, have over people who have no appreciation of art in any form, who are impervious to ebullitions of sentiment or pathos, whose aspirations never soar beyond the real and the tangible. Methinks,”

he added, fixing his rapt gaze on the ceiling, "I can hear many a man whom cruel critics have crucified, consoling himself with the beautiful words of the suffering satyr, which seem to me to embody much of the worth of life, —

‘Not only those
Who hold clear echoes of the voice divine
Are honorable, — they are blest, indeed,
Whate’er the world has held, — but those who hear
Some fair faint echoes, though the crowd be deaf,
And see the white gods’ garments on the hills,
Which the crowd sees not, though they may not find
Fit music for their visions ; they are blest,
Not pitiable. . . .
. . . . More it is than ease,
Palace and pomp, honors and luxuries,
To have seen white presences upon the hills,
To have heard the voices of the eternal gods.’ ”

But even in Mr. Blake’s happiest moods there was always a tinge of melancholy, as if there were some harrowing mystery enshrouding his life. I think that he almost regarded himself in the light of a martyr. He would often say to me, when wishing to be confidential, "It might be so different, if things were only different." I never could quite make out what he meant by these words except that under his present circumstances he lived and strove merely from a sense of duty, not because existence was a pleasure to him. For the law he did not care much, but he was tremen-

dously absorbed in poetry, music, and art, in all of which he had essayed his abilities in an amateurish way, and he often hinted that he intended some time to produce something worth living for. Of his power to do so he apparently had no doubts, but the awful *cui bono*, as he himself termed it, stared him in the face and enervated his will. Some of the girls declared that the *cui bono* was only an excuse for laziness, which, needless to say, appeared to me an unkind stricture.

But before I could make up my mind what I really did think about all these things, the time came for us to move to Newport, and the bustle of change gave me little chance for further self-analysis. Our cottage, which Papa had bought some five years before of Mr. Meacham Williams when he failed, is situated on the Cliff side, and looks straight out to sea. There is a current impression that Newport is only attractive during the "season," which does not begin until the middle of July; but to me the pleasantest time is in June, before the advent of the randan and the consequent whirl of gayety. Of course it is awfully quiet in one sense of the word, but there is a charm about little lawn-tennis parties and peaceful sybaritic "teas" which only the initiated can appreciate.

In the morning, as soon as breakfast was over,

I used generally to take the pony phaeton and call for Grace Irving, who lived about five minutes' drive from us on Bellevue Avenue. Looking fresh as daisies in our cool cambrics and picturesque shade-hats, we would take a spin into town, and shop a little or chat with the other girls, while Thomas the groom took charge of Billy the pony. Or else, if the spirit moved us, we went over to the Van Amburghs' or Stillman Eastons' for a game of tennis. Both these houses were regular *rendezvous* for lawn-tennis. You were pretty sure to find eight or ten people there glad to play. I perfectly idolized the game. I had practised a great deal the summer before, so, as Harry Coney remarked once, when I beat him a "love set," I was no slouch of a player. He said that he tried his best, but I had my doubts.

Everybody wore white flannel suits and canvas shoes with colored lacings, and some of the girls used to perch little round gaudy caps on the tops of their heads. It was proposed to have a tennis tournament later on in the summer, and we were all anxious to improve before that time. I had Papa pick me out the nicest racket that he could find in New York and send it on to me.

Then there was the beach. Bathing was rather a nuisance because of your hair; but if there was

nothing else to do we generally went. After my bath I was apt to do a little light reading while my hair was drying. In the afternoon Mamma and I drove on the Avenue in the landau, or Papa or some one else took me out in a dog-cart. Even so early in the season it was dreadfully hard to remember, in meeting people, whether you had passed them before and therefore ought not to bow again, or whether you were meeting them for the first time and ought not to pass without bowing. Very often one or two people would drop in to tea in the evening, or I would be asked to an informal gathering of the same sort somewhere else. They were harmless affairs, those teas, — only a little thin-spread bread-and-butter and a lazy *tête-à-tête* on the piazza afterwards. If I remained at home and nobody happened in, I would loll in the dear old hammock, wondering at the stars and killing mosquitoes until the sea-breeze fanned me into a bed-like frame of mind. It was a lotus-like, perhaps humdrum sort of existence; but we clung to it while it lasted, for already we could hear in the near distance the roar of the monster wave of fashionable gayety, that a few weeks hence would burst upon us, and bear us with resistless force on its foaming, seething crest far into the autumn.

And almost before we knew it, it was upon us, and Newport became in a single day, as it were, a sort of mixture of babel and fairy-land. The little morning spin into town, the game of tennis, the bath, the drive upon the Avenue, the slothful tea, — their outward forms were with us still, but the spirit that prompted them had undergone mutation. Where all before was repose and supineness, repose either by day or night was now no longer possible. For who could rest, or even think of rest, when visions of gorgeous equipages, superb costumes, stately drags, delightful *attachés*, maddening music, fascinating strangers, and thrilling polo-contests were churning in your brain in one uproarious chaos? What chance for the lotus to bloom when Coming Gowing's priceless iron grays, and Mrs. Gatling Gunn's darling duds of ponies, and Mrs. Van Amburgh's garish family-coach, and the sleek cobs of countless foreign emissaries were tearing up the Avenue in one grand, well-bred tear? Peace and tranquillity had abandoned the ancient seaport town, and in their stead the landscape was rife with the glitter and shine of a thousand liveries, the shop-keepers were selling white flannel at an enormous advance in price, and a bevy of Mexican ponies were kicking their heels in aristocratic stables impatient for the fray.

Everybody had arrived. The hotels were full, the boarding-houses overflowing. The most dilatory cottager had taken down his window-shutters. People who had money and were able to cut a dash, and people who had money enough to come and see other people cut a dash (itself an expensive pleasure), crowded every available nook and shelter. Little Chicky Chalmers was there, on a new drag with yellow wheels with red stripes. Dear Muchfeedi Pasha of the Turkish legation smiled once more, right and left, from his wagonet, as he brandished the whip over his dark brown pair. Stylish, handsome New York girls, perched on Gerald Pumystone's dog-cart or giving color to Stylington Ribblehurst's tandem, inquired eagerly the name of the bewitching little Baltimorean in Mamie Hatche's phaeton, who looked as if her clothes had been fired at her, but had such a lovely face. Dashing, piquant, garrulous Philadelphians, with large white feathers in their broad-brimmed hats, scrutinized with awe calm, fastidious, well-bred looking girls from Boston, whose only blemish, to quote Mrs. Gunn, was holding themselves "off" their looks.

It was a breathless, whirling pace, but it was fun. The beach, calls, tennis, polo, picnics, receptions, the Avenue, the Fort, dinners, hops, balls, and

church, and then through the list again *ad infinitum*, meeting charming people whom you saw every day, flirting with charming people whom you had never met before and whom you never expected to meet again, exchanging a word with some impecunious slave, dashing off on the arm of a transient millionaire, — such was the delirious round of our days, but it was fun.

And if in the midst of all this whirl I ever stopped to think, it was to feel thankful that Papa was rich, and that we were able to have all sorts of dresses and carriages and harnesses and horses and grooms. For, in order to be anything but a lay-figure in the pageant, it was necessary to have all these, and have them in perfection. “Do everything in tip-top style” was the motto of the community, and it was towards this goal that everybody tended. Not, by any means, that everybody came up to the standard. Far from it. The canons of taste were sinned against almost as frequently as the Commandments. Ever and anon some fascinating goddess in the midst of the press, reclining with consummate grace upon the cushions of her artistically appointed barouche, would shudder, and whisper in a voice of horror to her companion, as some outrageously dressed barbarian from the outside world dashed by, “Did you ever see any-

thing so peculiar?" The lovely eyes of many a girl to whom the conventionalities of society were as a second alphabet were opened in well-bred astonishment at the outlandish movements of maidens to whom "hops" were a delightful but evidently novel experience. And yet, rank as these offences seemed, they did but represent the yearnings and struggles of people burning to attain the elegant finish, the exquisite deportment, that distinguished those in whom the laws of good-breeding were innate. Although still far from the throne, the eyes of these quick-witted *nouveaux riches* were ever directed towards it. A short season's experience would teach them to tone down and blend more harmoniously their colors. Wealth, the *sine quâ non*, was theirs; time would complete the rest. The lessons learned from experience would bear fruit in the next generation, if they kept their money. In the brilliant equipages of their sons and the faultless toilettes of their daughters, the fathers and mothers who smarted to-day were to find balm for their wounds. The fastidious laughed and sniffed now at the atrocities of Mrs. Dave Landry, wife of the patentee of "Landry's Cleansing Soap," as she strutted ostentatiously through the corridors of the Ocean House; but the time would come, perhaps, when her daughter

Blanche would be pronounced the most fascinating girl in town and her son, Hermann Landry, become such a master of etiquette as to feel instinctively, if he happened to be in his bath when Mrs. Stylington Ribblehurst whispered to him through the telephone, a desire to put on his embroidered dressing-gown before answering her summons.

The ignorant rich had a future, but for the poor man there was no hope. Newport was no place for paupers, except foreigners and celebrities. Girl as I was, I appreciated how fortunate it was for me that people, as our carriage passed, turned involuntarily to admire the brilliancy of our harnesses, the beauty of our horses, the dignified faces of our grooms, the general stylishness and costliness, in fact, of the *tout ensemble*.

As for me individually, if I had been a success in New York, I had become doubly one here. Even Mamma expressed fears that my head might be turned by the amount of attention showered upon me. Steadily upon the go from noon to early dawn, I had literally barely time to breathe, much less to think. There was rarely an entertainment, however small, to which I was not invited, and every stranger made a point of being introduced to me. I had grown older, too. Successful contact with the world had proved an anti-

dote to diffidence. In my words and actions there were few traces left of the *ingénue*. Mrs. Gunn could no longer complain that I did not hold my head up. I swept through the halls of fashion with a style and *abandon* that sometimes astonished even myself, and must have made others turn green with jealousy.

And yet every now and then a ghastly feeling would creep over me that somehow it was all terribly hollow and a dreadful waste of time. Often in the thick of a ball-room the thought "What is the good of all this?" would steal upon me and haunt me like a nightmare. When I laid my head upon my pillow at night, nasty little voices would whisper in my ears until I grew nearly frantic, "Sawdust, sawdust!" If I ever paused for a moment in my mad career, if I by any chance had time to think, the buzz of these tormenting spirits oppressed me so, that, to save myself from becoming morbidly blue, I was forced to plunge again into the ocean of gayety. I found that my only security from the pricks of conscience was to keep upon the go the whole time. Even thus I was ever conscious of a big weight at my heart, but while the music lasted I felt that it could grow no larger. I was not happy, and I knew that I was not happy; but how could I bear the idea of re-

nouncing the admiration that I had come to regard almost as a positive right, of giving up all my fun, and subsiding into a quiet stay-at-home little body, whose only dissipation was philanthropy? "Consider your immortal soul," whispered the still small voice. "Oh yes, I know," I would reply, with a little spasmodic kick of despair; "but it seems to me like saving my immortal soul at the expense of my arms and legs, and I care for my arms and legs, oh, so much!"

Then, too, Mamma bothered me dreadfully at this time. Of course she was immensely proud of my success, and was naturally anxious to have me make a good match; but it was awfully provoking to be everlastingly nagged with questions as to whether I liked this man and how much I had seen of that one. She was the whole time in a perpetual state of worry lest I should engage myself on the sly to some one of whom she disapproved. She called me secretive, because I refused to tell her to the square inch the state of my feelings in regard to Mr. Blake. She must have asked me at least twenty times in the course of the summer whether I corresponded with Harry Coney. The latter was her especial *bête noire*. There was nothing disagreeable that she did not say about him. I used to stand up for him stubbornly when she

abused him, and the discussion generally ended with Mamma's retiring from the room in a flood of tears, calling me an unfilial child. I suppose that it seemed perfectly brutal of me to act so, but how could I help it? I could n't tell Mamma what I did n't know myself. Her questions were prompted, I knew, by her affection for me; but, after all, it was *my* heart that was to be disposed of, and it was dreadfully irritating to be continually suspected of wanting to play ducks and drakes with it. Besides, with due respect to Mamma, I felt sure that curiosity often prompted her, against her better judgment, to try to pump me; and I do not believe that even an angel would stand being pumped.

It was Mamma's hobby that I should marry a rich man. I must do her the justice to say that she never told me so in express words; but all her innuendoes pointed that way. I noticed, for instance, that if any one whose financial outlook was gloomy happened to devote himself to me, I was sure to hear something horrible about him before long; either that his habits were bad, or that there was insanity in the family, or that he had but one lung, or some other ghastly thing. On the other hand, if I ever chanced to mention some bit of gossip which cast a reflection on the brains or morals of any of the wealthy creatures

who admired me, Mamma would invariably remark that it was very silly to repeat such ill-natured things, and that she had always heard the subject of my stricture spoken of as a most delightful young man.

I was also haunted more or less by the feeling that, exciting as it all was, my daily way was over gunpowder vaults, that might at any time explode and cause me a great deal of unhappiness. To tell the truth, three or four young men were becoming so desperately devoted to me that I was liable any moment to be made the victim of an harassing scene. As luck would have it, all my former admirers had congregated at Newport. The Pumystones and Blakes owned cottages there, and Harry Coney had taken rooms in a snuggerly near the Club. Even Murray Hill came up from New York every week to spend Sunday with his family, and showed himself on the Avenue on quite a respectable-looking horse. In regard to the latter I did not feel much alarm, for although he still came to see me sometimes, and seemed to imply by his manner that his feeling for me was just as strong as ever, he never showed any disposition to trench upon dangerous ground.

But for the others I could not say as much. Mr. Manhattan Blake was more attentive than

ever. He appeared at the house almost every day. He sent me books, he loaded me with flowers. Because I refused to walk on the Cliffs with him oftener than once a week, he looked the impersonation of human despair. I lived in mortal dread of his going down on his knees and forcing me to decide. Whenever we were alone together, he expressed his affection by the most unequivocal hints; but thus far I had managed to misunderstand him and change the subject in time. I knew, however, that just as surely as the sun shone in heaven it had got to come sooner or later. And when it did come what should I do? Oh, what should I do? The worst of it was I did not have the least idea whether I liked him or not; or rather I knew that I liked him a little, but was in doubt as to the amount. One day I would make up my mind I did not care a pin ever to see him again, and yet, if a day or two chanced to pass without my having seen him, I was sure to feel uneasy and out of sorts until I did. My fervent hope was that fate would stave off the evil day for a long time to come. I should be so much happier if things remained as they were. I did not want to refuse Mr. Blake. I hated the thought of giving him up. But, on the other hand, I was not ready for the altar. I had no desire to be mar-

ried at present. The idea of linking myself for eternity to a man, when viewed as a proximate reality, had as yet no convincing charms for me. I was not in the mood to give up my freedom for any one's sake. There was a great deal about Mr. Blake that fascinated me, but there was also a great deal about him that I did not like, or at any rate had suspicions in regard to. I knew that Papa thought him namby-pamby. And while Papa had prejudices, and was matter-of-fact in his tastes, I felt that about most things he was awfully sensible. I could not feel sure that he might not be right.

Besides, there were Harry Coney and Gerald Pumystone to be considered. On certain days I almost felt doubts as to whether I did not like the former about as well as Mr. Blake. It was in my naughty moods, as I have already mentioned, that these doubts assailed me; but then my naughty moods were apt to be tolerably frequent. If I were to marry Mr. Blake, thought I, and one of these naughty moods should come upon me in a wedded state, how dreadful it would be! Mr. Pumystone, too, had been extremely devoted to me lately. I had driven with him on his dog-cart so much that people had noticed it considerably. I did not suppose that his attentions were to be taken in a

serious way, but I could not feel perfectly certain as to the light in which I ought to regard them. There was no doubt of the fact that he was everlastingly hanging around me,—so much so, that Mamma was in high feather about it, and was for ever praising him up to the skies in my presence. All these considerations weighed with me more or less of course, and I felt myself growing thin in the endeavor to solve the problem to the satisfaction of everybody, myself included.

In order to describe more effectively the remainder of this summer's campaign,—for, in view of all that happened, campaign is the appropriate word,—I am going to make use again of that little morocco-covered diary in which my daily experiences were chronicled. It is a complete register in black and white of my thoughts and feelings at this time, fresh from the mint. Let it tell its own story.

JULY 29.

The season may fairly be said to be in full blast. It is tremendously gay. I spent this morning at the Stillman Eastons', playing tennis. They have two Boston girls staying with them. The latter were rather pretty, and did not impress me as being especially intellectual. I dare say, though, that they are walking dictionaries in disguise. I

feel sure that Murray Hill would not have to explain to them the composition of a bone. Poor Murray Hill! He came up from New York for Sunday, and I sat next to him at dinner at the Horsely Clymbers' on Saturday. He certainly improves every day. I do respect and admire him beyond measure. He is a splendid man. I could make him an admirable sister. But that would n't satisfy him; and I — oh, well — well, I don't love him, and what's the use of talking about it? I do wish, though, that he would wear straps when he rides on horseback. He appeared on the Avenue the other day with his pantaloons half-way up to his knees.

This afternoon I went to Polo, and afterwards to pour out tea at Mrs. Gunn's reception. Harry Coney and Gerald Pumystone were both among the players. The former's pony fell with him in one of the most exciting parts, and Mr. Coney was pitched on to his head. When I saw him go over, I thought he would undoubtedly be killed, and gave, without meaning to, a little shriek. Mamie Hathe and Pussy Baiker, who were in the next carriage, overheard me and smiled at one another. I could have bitten out my tongue for having done it, but I thought of course that he was killed.

At the reception, Muchfeedi Pasha and the Hon. Hare Hare never left my side. The latter is spend-

ing a fortnight with Mrs. Gunn, and seems to have made improvements in his dress. I asked Mrs. Gunn the other day what she found so attractive about him. "He is odious, my dear, *de fond en comble*," replied she, "but I like to have the prize ox in my stables."

I dined at the Stylington Ribblehursts', and sat between Mr. Manhattan Blake and Muchfeedi Pasha. The world seems to have made up its mind that I am going to marry Mr. Blake. He invariably sits next to me at any dinner to which we both happen to be invited. People with sensitive organizations send me in with some one else, and put Mr. Blake on my other side. Those whose taste is less delicate do it up brown, and send me in with Mr. Blake as well. Lately I have sat next to Gerald Pumystone a good deal. I want to sit between him and Mr. Blake some time. It would be fun. I wonder how they would act. Mr. Blake was in a low state of mind. He talked about giving up the law for a year, and going to Europe to study art and the languages. I imagine that he expected me to manifest great surprise at the announcement, for he paused for a moment after making it. It *was* rather a revelation, but I did not make any comment until he inquired what I thought of the plan. I told him that in my opinion he had better stick to the law.

“Do you think there would be more hope for me if I did?” murmured he, with a little nervous look.

“Hope?” said I. “Of course you know a great deal better than I do what you are best fitted for, but I should suppose that you would probably find the law the most satisfactory in the long run, Mr. Blake.” And then, before he could repeat his question, I exclaimed, “What do you think of the tennis tournament?”

It is dreadful to have to be on one’s guard the whole time, but the least unwariness on my part would lead to an explosion. And even when I head him off as I did to-night, I feel that he is perfectly capable of supposing that my reply is intended to be allegorical, and construing it into a tacit encouragement of his suit, which maiden coyness prohibits my abetting openly. I noticed to-night that he looked rather happy than otherwise after what I said. I do wish that I knew whether I liked him or not.

AUGUST 4.

I have been driving all the afternoon with Gerald Pumystone. His manners are certainly remarkably good, and all the little frills which he puts on in general society do not intrude themselves noticeably into a *tête-à-tête*. But then he is awfully

stupid if one attempts any conversation out of the beaten track. He took it into his head this afternoon to follow Mr. Blake's example, and do a little hinting. It was in the jocular vein, to be sure, and I had no difficulty in treating it as badinage, but I felt all of a tremor for a moment at the thought of how completely I was at his mercy if he chose to select his dog-cart as a place of proposal. My fear was manifest in my answer, for I told him that if he talked any more such nonsense I would get down and walk.

The tennis tournament began to-day. We drew lots for partners, and I am doomed to play with the Hon. Hare Hare. The games are to be four-handed; a lady and gentleman on each side. There are eight pairs, and the pair that wins the most games is to have a gorgeous pair of rackets. Harry Coney is to play with Mamie Hatche, Coming Gowing with Peepy Marshmellow, Gerald Pumy-stone with Grace Irving, Chicky Chalmers with Lina Van Rooster, Willy Easton with Maud Van Amburgh, Muchfeedi Pasha with Pussy Baiker, and Thedy Ribblehurst with Nuny Clymber. I do not see the point of having Muchfeedi Pasha play, as he hardly ever had a racket in his hands. But then, as Mrs. Ribblehurst said, it might hurt his feelings not to ask him, and he is *so* good-looking.

AUGUST 9.

I have been to-day at a morning German, two receptions, and a dinner, and am nearly dead. The dinner was at the Stillman Eastons', and my curiosity to see how Gerald Pumystone and Manhattan Blake would act with me between them was gratified at last. Mr. Pumystone took me in, and Mr. Blake was on my other side. The former did all the running. Poor Mr. Blake seemed subdued and almost sulky. It may have been because I ran away from him and spent the whole time at the Baikers' reception in a retired spot with Mr. Coney when I knew he was looking. But what if I did! It is none of Manhattan Blake's business whom I talk to, and he may sulk until doomsday for all I care.

AUGUST 11.

I am too disappointed for any thing. We lost the tennis tournament just by a hair's-breadth, and those lovely rackets are the property of Mamie Hatche and Harry Coney. We had each beaten all our sets, and the match lay between our two pairs. We lost it by only one game. If we had been playing against any one but Harry Coney and Mamie Hatche, I know that we should have won. But I became very nervous. I was particularly anxious to play well against Mr. Coney,

and for that very reason I could not hit a single ball. The Hon. Hare Hare did wonders, but it was of no use. As the men say, I went all to pieces. I would have given worlds not to have had it happen. Mamie Hatche looked as proud as Tarquinia. Harry Coney has been devoted to her lately, and she knows that I know it.

AUGUST 14.

I had another narrow escape to-day. Mr. Blake persuaded me to walk with him on the Cliffs, and as it was a most lovely afternoon, we clambered down on to the rocks, and sat looking seaward together for some time. He told me a great deal about himself that I had not heard before; notably the details of an *affaire du cœur* he had had, when he was twenty-one and in college, with a Philadelphia girl at Mt. Desert. According to his own account he must have been most shamefully treated. She engaged herself to him, and although their engagement was kept secret they were to all intents and purposes betrothed. This state of affairs continued without change apparently until within a few days of her leaving Mt. Desert, when she said to him one morning that she had come to the conclusion that she did not care for him as she ought to care for a husband, and that she must

ask him to give her up. She sent him back the little engagement-ring he had had forwarded from Tiffany's for her, and all the memorials of his few weeks of happiness, and took the next steamer for home, leaving him almost heart-broken among strangers whom he had entirely neglected for her sake.

He pictured to me most graphically and with intense feeling the grief her conduct had caused him, and how he had subsequently grown cynical, morbid, and out of conceit with life. I had had a vague idea, from remarks he had let drop before during the winter, that he had passed through some such experience, but of course the particulars made it seem much more dreadful. I had grown so completely absorbed in his recital, and felt so much sympathy for him, that I had quite forgotten our own relation, when all of a sudden these words struck my ear: —

“Yes, Miss Palmer, it has been a terrible ordeal, and I thought at one time I should never be able to care for any woman again; but, thank Heaven, I can say honestly to-day that I love a thousand times more deeply and truly than ever before, — and the object of that love is you.”

I jumped as if I had been shot. Between the cliff on which we were sitting and the next one

was a deep chasm or gully into which the waves rushed at high tide, but which this afternoon was empty. We had previously been amusing ourselves by dropping pebbles down it into the puddles that had formed at the bottom. The sides were all shaggy with wet brown sea-weed, and starfish and other marine creatures were crawling about in its recesses.

I happened at the moment to be dangling my parasol by the ring just above this chasm, and quick as a flash, as the words "and the object of that love is you" fell upon the air, I instinctively let the ring slip from my finger, and my parasol descended to communé with the sea-anemones.

"O Mr. Blake, my parasol, my brand-new parasol!" I shrieked, bending over the abyss as far as was prudent, in an apparent endeavor to regain it. "Oh, I have lost my parasol!"

Mr. Blake, half reluctantly, as if wishing to imply that where true love was concerned, the letting fall of a parasol was but a drop in the bucket, said, "I will climb down and get it for you, Miss Palmer."

"But is n't it awfully dangerous?" I cried.

The idea of danger seemed to inspire him, and with a light laugh he began to climb down the face of the precipice, in spite of my eager protestations that the parasol was of no value and

very ugly. I watched him descend from ledge to ledge with more or less apprehension for his safety, but with decided exultation as to the success of my ruse. He reached the bottom at last, and recovered my property without further misfortune than wetting one foot in a puddle which was screened from sight by sea-weed. He looked up at me triumphantly, and shouted out something, but I was too far off to understand what he said. Five minutes later he was by my side, panting and wet, with the parasol in his hand.

“Oh, thank you ever so much, Mr. Blake!” I cried. “It was very, very kind of you.”

“It was a very great pleasure to me, I assure you,” said he.

“I think we had better be going home,” said I. “It is getting late, and you ought not to sit down after heating yourself.”

All the way home I talked just as fast as I could about indifferent subjects, and Mr. Blake did not make any further attempt to probe the state of my affections. He seemed very quiet, and when he bade me adieu at my door, simply said, “Good night.”

But it was certainly a wonderful escape. And what is worse, I really do not know what I should have answered if matters had come to a *dénouement*.

AUGUST 18.

Harry Coney declares that he does not care a straw about Mamie Hatche, but he is certainly with her a great deal. I had an awful dispute with Mamma about him last night. She wished to know my exact relations with him, and because I refused to tell her, we had it hot and heavy. She called him an unprincipled adventurer, and I vowed, in a fit of passion, that if he asked me I would marry him. Mamma was awfully distressed, and called Papa into the room, who maddened me by saying I had been very foolish in refusing Mr. Hill. The row ended by my stamping my foot, and abandoning the field in tears, calling, as a parting shot, heaven to witness that I would marry whomever I liked. Of course I have been miserable ever since. Why won't they let me alone?

AUGUST 26.

The end has come. The pitcher that goes too often to the well is sure to be broken at last. Manhattan Blake sails for Europe on Saturday, and I — oh, I don't know what to think about myself. I am perfectly wretched. And yet if it was to be done all over again, I would act just the same; that is, I think that I would. Yes, I know

I would. He accused me of flirting. He said that I had encouraged him and deluded him with false hopes. How cruel, how unmanly, of him! I never intentionally deluded anybody. I simply did not know my own mind. When it came to the actual point, I found out that I did not like him well enough to say yes, but before he asked me I really felt some doubts. I do not even now feel perfectly sure that I shall be happy without him. I shall miss his attentions dreadfully. I shall not have half so much to think about for the future. My heart feels like a dry sponge. All the romance is wrung out of it. And yet I acted rightly, my instinct tells me that I did. We should not have got on together. Frivolous as I am, I have some ambition, and I want to marry a man who is in earnest, and Mr. Blake, in spite of all his interesting views of life, may never amount to any thing, I am afraid.

And Harry Coney too! I grew perfectly white with rage when I heard of his perfidy. To think of his engaging himself to that little snip of a Mamie Hatche, after having insinuated to me, time and time again this summer, that I was the only woman he could ever care for! Mr. Hatche is richer than Papa. Mamma was right. But it is a dreadful thing to think that men are capable of

such treachery. He might have broken my heart. If I had been of a little more credulous disposition, he might have ruined my happiness for life. I wish him joy of Mamie, I am sure. She scarcely knows how to spell, and if she has not a party to go to, invariably falls to sleep after dinner. But looked at from any point of view, it is a blow to one's pride to be tossed aside like an old glove.

I met Mrs. Gunn driving on the Avenue this morning, and she cried out, in passing, "I warned you that he was no chicken, *ma chère*." Ugh! it is simply disgusting.

I tried my best to ward off Mr. Blake, but it was of no use. After my recent experience, I ought to have known better than to walk on the Cliffs with him again. Unless I had flung myself into the sea, I could not have prevented him from speaking this time. There was no convenient chasm and I had no parasol. Argus-eyed as I have lately been when in his presence, I was caught napping for the moment. We were sitting upon a flat rock, close to the water's edge, enjoying the sunset, which was peculiarly fine. Entirely oblivious of what was working in his mind, I had become silent, as I often do when in the presence of beautiful things, and, lost in admiration of

the changing colors of the twilight, was repeating to myself Coleridge's beautiful sonnet: —

“ Oh, it is pleasant, with a heart at ease,
Just after sunset or by moonlight skies,
To make the shifting clouds be what you please,
Or let the easily persuaded eyes
Own each quaint likeness issuing from the mould
Of a friend's fancy ; or with head bent low
And cheek aslant, see — ”

“ Miss Palmer,” broke in Mr. Blake at this moment, “ I want to say something very particular to you.”

During my reverie my eyes had been looking out over the sea, and when his words reached me I still kept my gaze fixed in that direction without moving a muscle, but I could feel the blood at the roots of my hair mount up and suffuse my face. Then followed from his lips a torrent of burning speech, the import of which was only too intelligible. He took in his my hand, which lay idly on my lap. “ Dearest Alice,” said he, “ will you be my wife? ”

Alas for poor me, the time for decision was come ! I must make up my mind now, once and for ever. No more shilly-shallying was possible. I could no longer flatter myself with the delusion that after all he might not really be in earnest. The misty garb of the lover had been thrown aside, and the would-be husband stood before me in all his

grim reality. The question was simply, Had I rather become Mrs. Manhattan Blake, or remain plain Alice Palmer? And it was necessary to come to a definite conclusion at once. Insidious voices, it is true, whispered, "Temporize, delay, tell him that you will give him an answer in six months;" but a finer instinct warned me that to tell him now that I did not know, or to ask him to wait, or to let things remain as they were, would be tantamount to surrender. Sweet as the Fabian policy always is, I realized that in this case it would be synonymous with a tacit consent to kneel down with him some day at the altar. But then to give him up for good seemed equally horrible. The thought of either alternative filled me with dismay. Just as the long-forgotten train of events of their past lives are said to recur vividly to the minds of drowning people, all that had happened during my acquaintance with Mr. Blake — his charms, his demerits, his peculiarities, his ideas, in fact, all that he had ever said and done — came back to me with photographic distinctness. In these few minutes I seemed to live the past year over again, and at the end I felt that I was still tossing upon a stormy sea of doubts, helpless as the jelly-fish wobbling in the water at my feet.

"Say that you will, dearest, — one little word," I

heard him murmur. I gave a start, and half unconsciously drew my hand from his grasp and clasped it in its mate. Although so largely mechanical, the gesture filled me with a sense of recovered freedom, seemed symbolical as it were of breaking the chain.

"You don't want to be married yet. You don't really love him, you know you don't," cried one of the still small voices that have taken up their abiding-place within me, and strive for the mastery of my being.

"But you can't give him up. You can't, you can't. He is ever so nice, and you like him *so* much," sighed the *concierge* of my aching heart.

"Reflect, though; it is not for a day, but for life that he seeks you," whispered some guardian or evil angel, I know not which.

Yes, there was the bitter truth. It was for life that he sought me, and I — oh, I did not feel prepared to bind myself to pass my life with anybody. I like him very, very much, thought I, but when it comes to this, I cannot, oh, I cannot. Yes, he must go. He must go, even if it break my heart. I am sorry for him, but it must be done.

And as it began to dawn upon me what my answer must be, I felt myself congealing into a state of stately reserve. A stern dignity began to creep

over my muscles and sinews. The iciness which experience has taught me preludes a refusal stole into my heart and glittered in my eyes. I put out my hand, metaphorically speaking, to grasp the cup.

While still I wavered, — for, in spite of my resolution, I still did waver, — my lifted eyes chanced to fall upon two figures clearly outlined against the evening sky, a man's and a girl's. They were sitting together, much as we were, upon a distant cliff. He was stretched out at her feet and looking up in her face. Her back was turned to us and her head concealed by her parasol, but I should have recognized that parasol miles away. They were Mamie Hatche and Harry Coney. The monster!

Some girls in my place would, I dare say, under the influence of this discovery, have accepted his rival on the spot. I can appreciate now what marrying out of pique means, but I am not that kind of girl. For the moment I almost forgot Mr. Blake in the pangs of wounded pride, in the bitterness of playing second fiddle. Had it come to this that I, Alice Palmer, must own myself discarded for another, and such another! Never; it should not be.

It was a trivial incident, but trivial incidents often shape our lives. Insignificant as it was, it turned the already trembling balance, it sealed the

fate of Mr. Blake. It is always difficult to say, after a thing has happened, how one would have acted if certain determining elements had been wanting; but it is just possible that if my eyes had not chanced to fall at that critical moment upon Mr. Coney and Mamie, I might—I do not think it at all probable—but I *might* have given a little less decided answer to Mr. Blake.

As it was, I turned to him, and said as kindly and sweetly as I could, consistently with the dreadful embarrassment that one feels under such circumstances, what it was necessary for me to tell him; that I did not love him, that I had no desire to be married, that he had better carry out his plan of going to Europe, and forget me. It was a very painful scene. He would not take no for an answer, but begged and teased me to think his proposal over for six months.. I felt like crying, but although tears were in my eyes, I was firm enough to assure him that time could make no difference in my feelings towards him. When I broke the silence that followed his outpouring of heart-broken words with a well-meant, but what I can see now was an injudicious, expression of regret, that our friendship must have such an ending, he gave a bitter, sepulchral sort of laugh, and, quoting a French couplet which I could not understand,

accused me of having played fast and loose with him. This naturally made me very angry, and I protested with flashing eyes that I had done nothing of the kind. He repeated his statement in such a cruel, cynical way, alluding so disagreeably to my relations with Mr. Coney and Mr. Pumystone, that I started to my feet and told him I never wished to see him again, — never. It was a perfectly dreadful scene. He tried to escort me home, but I forbade him to come near me, and in a state of deep agitation I tore along the Cliffs until I reached our house. I looked back once to see if he was following me, and observed that he had resumed his seat upon the rocks and was looking out over the sea.

This morning I received a note from him, very cold and very formal, enclosing some pressed flowers, — flowers that I had given him, the bud which I was foolish enough to let him have at my first ball, — and he sails for Europe on Saturday. I have felt all day like sitting down and writing to him to come to me, but I know that if I did, I should destroy the note the instant after it was written. One moment I feel as if I would give worlds not to have said the fatal words, and yet, whenever the idea of being linked to him for life crosses my thoughts, I tremble to think how near I came to saying yes

yesterday afternoon. If it had n't been for Papa and — perhaps Harry Coney, only think, we might have been sitting in the parlor at this moment an affianced couple. It is rather a ghastly thought, on the whole.

I cried over the flowers. The little bud was all shrivelled up, so I had to fling it into the grate, but some of the others were rather nicely pressed. Poor fellow, he will have a horribly gloomy passage. I wonder if he is a good sailor.

I am glad that Mamie Hatche did not have the impudence to write and tell me of her engagement. Everybody is talking about it. Mamma, when I came into the breakfast-room this morning, asked if I had heard the news in such a funereal tone that I supposed somebody must be dead.

“What news, Mamma?” said I.

“Harry Coney is engaged to Mamie Hatche,” and then she added in a voice of sympathy, “My poor child, I am very, very sorry for you.”

It was simply exasperating to be pitied, but I suppose that, owing to our previous violent discussions on the subject, Mamma fancies that I cared seriously for the faithless Harry. She has thus far no inkling of my break with Mr. Blake, and as I have been on the verge of tears all day, she naturally lays my wretchedness at his fickle rival's

door. Everybody will say, of course, that Mr. Coney has broken my heart, and I shall be put in the category with Mamie Van Rooster and the other victims of misplaced affection. Mothers will point me out in the street to their refractory daughters, as the foolish girl whose happiness for life was ruined by a designing adventurer against whom she had been warned. Well, let them if they want to; I don't care. It was awfully good fun while it lasted, at any rate, and I ought to feel thankful that I am so well out of it, as the phrase is. Mamie Hatche is mistress of the situation now, but when she reaches the other side of the altar, my time will come. It will be flattering to my power of reading character, as well as soothing to my wounded pride, when I hear her crying for Sister Anna from the house-top.

I have been writing so much longer than usual that my candle is at its last gasp. Poor Mr. Blake! That is just what I wrote about Mr. Hill. I wonder if I can possibly be the least bit flirtatious. No, I am sure I am not. Any girl in my place would have done just the same. I couldn't tell whether I liked him or not until he asked me. I was awfully sorry not to feel able to accept him, but — but such is life.

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IV.

MY SECOND SEASON.

I THINK that even my diary fails to express how unhappy I was after the occurrence of the events mentioned in the last chapter. For many days subsequent to the departure of Mr. Blake, I was conscious of a hollow, sinking sort of feeling that made the ordinary pleasures and occupations of my life seem dismally dull. A sense that everything in this world was distressingly flat, and that the sawdust was all coming out of my doll, haunted my waking and sleeping hours. Although I continued to go about as usual to dinner-parties and receptions, the remainder of the season palled upon me dreadfully, and even the invigorating days of early autumn failed to inspire in me aught but melancholy. The variegated splendors of the changing leaf, which, though they incline one more or less to meditation, had generally been,

to me a source of infinite pleasure, suggested only gloomy, morbid fancies. I wandered around the shores unhappy as a ghost, and without much more color, looking out to sea, not exactly wondering what *he* was doing, but mulling over the various incidents of our acquaintance.

Not that for one moment I ever really repented of my resolution, nor doubted that if it were to be done over again, I should be able to play a second time Lady Macbeth to my vacillating purpose. But yet I hated to think that he was wretched upon my account, and his accusation that I had played fast and loose with him kept recurring to my mind in spite of my repeated protestations that it was groundless. I should have as soon thought of robbing a bird's-nest as of flirting deliberately with a young man and trying to break his heart in cold blood; still the result in this case had been almost as bad as if I had been actuated by some such malicious purpose, and I could not but feel distress that I had been fashioned by nature so slow in making up my mind. I had not been to blame,—of course I had not been to blame, — but a sensitive soul will often crucify itself for imaginary faults.

Besides, I missed him dreadfully. I missed his attentions. Not perhaps — although they were nice to have — because I valued them so very highly in

themselves, but because it was hateful to feel that I could no longer have them if I wanted them. I had unconsciously come to regard them as a part of my daily existence, and now that they were wanting it seemed as if a big hole had been made in my life which it would be at present impossible to fill.

At times, too, when I was particularly downcast, the awful doubt would assail me that my sentiments toward Mr. Blake might, after all, have been synonymous with true love, and that, from having conceived a too extravagant ideal of how one was supposed to feel when under the influence of the divine passion, I had unwittingly neglected to grasp the cup of happiness, and doomed myself perhaps to perpetual maidenhood. The moment, however, that I reflected seriously upon the matter, my instinct told me that my bosom had never as yet been visited by that absorbing feeling which I had read about in books, and heard described, — that ecstatic feeling which makes a woman forget all her own joys and sorrows in the delicious contemplation of and sympathy with those of some being of the other sex. But granting that I had not as yet known true love, was it likely that I should ever approach any nearer to that blissful state of mind? Was it probable that I should in the future entertain for any man a stronger feeling than I had felt

for Mr. Blake? There was the rub. The outlook certainly seemed a gloomy one. As in the solitude of my chamber I thought over the list of the by any chance possible masculine possibilities of my acquaintance, I failed to recall a single one in whose individuality I felt the slightest incentive to merge my own. I could not but acknowledge that there were among them delightful fellows, and that several of them might make desirable mates for other girls, if they happened to fancy them. But in that word "fancy" lay my whole difficulty. The idea of going wild over any of them provoked in me only a smile.

What, then, was I to do? I had always looked forward to being married some day, of course, or, rather, I had never taken the other side of the picture into consideration. I had grown up under the impression that the greater portion of even moderately attractive girls become wives sooner or later, and my glass told me daily that I was far from wanting in personal charms. But now, in the face of what had happened, I felt constrained to whisper frequently to Grace Irving, to whom my troubles were no secret, that I felt in my bones I should die an old maid.

"We will pass our lives together then, my dear, with a parrot and two cats apiece," was the inva-

riable reply of my *fidus Achates* ; but even such a prospect as this failed to wholly restore peace to my mind. I dare say, however, that my moodiness and apathy were increased by the fact that it was dreadfully stupid at first after our return to town. Everybody and everything in New York looked torpid, and there was absolutely nothing on earth to do but make good resolutions for the winter and break them during the exasperating process of trying on clothes. I began to feel I ought to make some effort towards the improvement of my mind, and that to longer fritter away my time in dreaming or even in self-analysis would not be consonant with what was due to myself. With this object in view, Grace Irving, Nunny Clymber, Maud Van Amburgh, and I agreed to study English Literature every Wednesday at eleven under the Miss Driggs who had given us Shakspeare lessons the previous winter. Grace Irving and I also engaged a Miss Halkbush to come to my house twice a week, in the morning, and go into the history of the Middle Ages with us. In the literature class we began with Chaucer and finished him in two lessons, and then took up Spenser, whom I had always before confounded somehow with Herbert Spencer, but who, of course, was an entirely different person. Miss Driggs considered that two cantos of the

“Fairy Queen” were sufficient to familiarize us with his style, and then she took up Milton’s “Paradise Lost,” thinking that, as we had already studied Shakspeare, it would not be best to spend any more time over him. In history we examined very carefully the reigns of the early German kings and emperors, an intimate knowledge of which Miss Halkbush declared indispensable to a thorough understanding of subsequent Teutonic events. For two or three weeks we had quite a fever of excitement over the Guelphs and Ghibellines and the Popes, and that splendid Frederick Barbarossa and Henry the Lion. At moments I pined to think that I had not been born a knight and lived in mediæval days. We ruined ourselves by investing in all sorts of curious maps and manuscripts, and I remember conceiving a strong admiration for the Prince of Wales, and buying his photograph because I discovered that he was a descendant of the Guelphs.

I undertook, also, to visit several poor families in connection with a charitable association in which Mamma was interested, and once a week I went in a carriage to see how they were getting on. I always felt terribly embarrassed in the presence of these unfortunate people, and had the greatest difficulty in thinking of anything to say. I made

it a point to go as simply dressed as possible, so as not to wound their sensibilities by contrasting my condition with theirs; but, in spite of this precaution, I could see that I was invariably regarded as an intruder, whom it was necessary to tolerate for the sake of the dollars and cents that were likely to result from the visit. My moral influence over them, on which I had especially relied as an auxiliary, amounted to absolutely nothing. They listened to my spiritual exhortations in the grim silence with which one whose breeding is bad receives a stale story, and one degenerate wretch, upon whose unhappy wife I was trying to impress the efficacy of prayer, had the audacity to remark, "Go it, Miss, and let's see if the Lord's Prayer'll set the pot a biling," and then he laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks at his irreverent jest. I could not help feeling that it did seem rather cold comfort and almost a mockery of their poverty to be sitting there warmly clad and plump, talking about the saving power of revealed religion to a starving creature with a drunken husband and seven small children.

I meant well, but I realized my impotency. The women were the worst. They were not, like the men, deterred, by disparity of sex, from openly betraying their contempt, and all my endeavors to get

them to confide in me were signally unsuccessful. They answered my questions in regard to their habits and mode of life with a dogged sullenness that said as plainly as possible, "None of your business," and if I tried to awaken their sympathies by making friends with their children, the mother's hatred of the visitor found vent in the tone in which she thundered at her unhappy offspring, "Get down, Mary Jane, you brat, or yer'll soil the lady's dress!" This was the only reward I got for heroically taking up into my lap and kissing a ragged infant of two, whose dirtiness positively made me crawl.

These and other kindred occupations served to divert my mind from feeding upon itself during the autumn months until the time came for me to be lured again into the vortex of winter gayety. The expression "lured" may draw forth from the cynical a smile, but it is the truth that there were times during the autumn when I felt almost prompted to give up society, or at any rate limit my party-going to very occasional appearances in the gay world. But when I came to look the matter squarely in the face I found myself unequal to the sacrifice, especially as I did not feel at all sure but that, even ethically speaking, I should be the better for another season's experience. What, for instance, was I to

do if I did n't go to parties? How should I employ myself, — find occupation? Men had their professions, their business, but for a girl there was nothing. There was Frederick Barbarossa, and Paradise Lost, and the ragged infant, to be sure, — but — but could n't I find time for them too? I had my mornings. Why would n't they do for the improvement of my mind and for serious thoughts? Yes, there was no reason why I should make a hermit of myself at this early stage, and renounce the world because of a few unintelligible twinges of conscience. Yes, I would go to parties.

But then, too, I would go this year in moderation; go enough, of course, to have a good time, but not run the thing into the ground, to quote Papa. I would be more careful also as to what I said and did. No young man should ever be able again to complain that I had beguiled him with false hopes. I would be discretion itself. I might flirt a little, perhaps, but only in such a way that the persons would understand that it was flirting, and only with persons who could by no chance become *too* desperate about me.

These were good resolutions, and I flattered myself that I should be able to keep them. I sallied forth to the first ball of the season in one of my new French dresses, with the firm conviction that

I had become sober-minded, in fact, almost a prude. But to fancy one's self regenerated before the fray is a totally different thing from being righteous under fire, and alas for the frailty of human determination! I returned from that ball—it was at Mrs. Chalmers's, and I had a perfectly gorgeous time—the same giddy, excitable creature as of yore, with all my good resolves broken into little pieces, and the light of deliberately planned conquest in my eyes.

From that day until the spectacle of Mrs. Gunn sitting in her boudoir, dressed in simple black, working a cross in beads upon an embroidery frame, told me that the Lenten season was upon us again, I never rested from the gay rôle of the butterfly. I realize the humiliation involved in the confession, and the scornful laugh of the cynic reverberates in my ears. I had meant to be so discreet, I had fancied I should be so dignified, I had so fully believed with all my heart I was going to show the other girls that there could be moderation in everything, and that— Oh, well, what is the use of sighing over the past? I failed, I acknowledge it frankly. I failed signally, I broke down hopelessly; I “went it” hammer and tongs, just as wildly as any of them. I accepted every invitation. I stayed everywhere as late as I could. I flirted desperately. When people said, “You will

ruin your health, dear," an amiable smile lit up my face, and I kept on just the same as ever. Papa used to cry, "We must shut down on this." Mamma vowed that I should go out only two evenings in the week; but somehow or other their threats were never executed, and my own sweet will was my sole guide and regulator.

Perhaps it was wicked, — I know it was foolish; but only think of the temptation! When I made those autumnal vows, I had overestimated my strength of purpose, I confess, but I had also in making them underestimated the outside pressure that would be brought to bear upon me. How could I have told that I was going to be such a favorite? I had no conception that people would make such a fuss about me. It is perfectly easy for a homely girl or a girl who has nothing to say for herself, to declare that she derives more genuine enjoyment from reading *Paradise Lost* than from dancing the German. I dare say she does. I should in her case. If I had had to spend the evening in solitary grandeur beside Mamma on the benches, or depend for my amusement on the pity or policy of transient men, digging potatoes would have seemed nearer akin to my idea of pleasure, and reading *Paradise Lost* a positive dissipation. When Millicent Davis reproved me in her snubby

way for neglecting my poor families in order to drive out on Stylington Ribblehurst's drag, I could not help feeling like saying to her, "You would give your eye-teeth, my love, to be in my shoes. If he were to ask you to go you would be so tickled that I don't believe you would think of a pauper for a week. But then, dear, the difficulty is that he never would ask you. Such an idea would never enter his head. In the first place, *ma chérie*, you are whopper-jawed (which, of course, is your misfortune, not your fault; but men do not always make such subtle discriminations); and, secondly, you never say anything when people do talk to you,—a circumstance which proceeds, *I* know, from great depth of character, but the world might be wicked enough, my Millicent, to call you a trifle dull."

I said, of course, nothing of the sort. I only thought these things in my naughty little heart. What I did say was something quite different, some airy, volatile speech which made light of her scruples, and doubtless made her think to herself what a frivolous, soulless thing that Alice Palmer is!

I have no desire to defend myself. All that I say is, would she, or any of the rest of them who sniffed at me and styled me a heartless worldling, have acted any differently if they had been in my

place, and had my advantages? I should like to see how any one of them would have behaved if, whenever she entered a ball-room or any place where people were congregated, she had heard on all sides suppressed whispers of "Isn't she a lovely creature?" and met glances of undisguised admiration in every eye. I knew what it was to be fêted and idolized and caressed. I knew what it was to have man fall down and worship me in spite of himself. I knew what it was to be the darling of society, and to feel that whatever I said or did, almost my very thoughts, sent an electric thrill through the little Cosmos which revolved about me. Did *they*? Were my experiences, my temptations, theirs? Could they, if they had desired it, have drunk out of the same cup as I and the little coterie who shared with me the idolatry of the world of fashion? Far from it. When plain, healthy-looking Marion Furbush, attired in her snowy swan's-down cloak and nubia, which ought to set off a girl's face to advantage if anything can, swept into Delmonico's after the theatre, men would murmur to their neighbors, "A buxom lass, n'est-ce-pas?" and resume their suppers. There was no danger of her head being turned, poor child! She had no cause to dread the fatal snare of beauty to which she confided to Grace Irving

she had prayed to Heaven that I might not fall a victim.

Dear, good Marion Furbush! When I weigh myself in the scale with you, how great, alas, was my deficiency! You were a much better girl than I ever thought of being. I was, I suppose, a giddy, wild, ruthless little flirt; you an affectionate, painstaking, dutiful daughter, an amiable, serious-minded, philanthropic woman. But tell me, Marion, frankly, did you ever know the exquisite delight of being told that you were very beautiful? Did any one, except that dyspeptic-looking little youth who won your heart and induced you to share his potage for life, ever tell you that he adored you? Did you ever experience the rapturous charm of having two or three men looking into your eyes at the same time, with the fire of burning love in their own? I can answer for you, Marion. You never did. But with naughty, frivolous me it was different, oh, so different! I could have married any one of ten men, — ten men, only think. I had such a time as you never dreamt of, my Puss, even in your wildest imaginings. That second winter was one long triumph, one brilliant spell of homage, as foreign to your life as your homely virtues were to mine. And yet do you believe away down in your heart of hearts, Marion, that if you had been in my place

you, even you, would have acted one whit better? Between ourselves, as it was, would n't you at times have liked to taste, did not you burn to taste, a little of the nectar that the gods had bestowed upon me, just a few drops? Is not a portion of your saintly integrity the result of the circumstance that wicked man austere-ly let you alone?

You look grave, Marion; your sweet face is full of sad reproach; you point to your husband as if to imply that my last words at least embodied an untruth. I know, — I know, my Marion, but none of my ten slaves was dyspeptic, — not one of them. But let us change the subject. I acknowledge that I was a frivolous, volatile, giddy thing.

But it was not the conscientious strictures of such unpretentious girls as Marion Furbush that rankled in my bosom. What was hard to bear were the envenomed remarks of quasi beautiful contemporaries who had tried to imitate me and failed, of girls who would fain have been belles themselves, had they but been able to strike the key-note of social approbation. There was nothing too bad for them to say about me. They would not allow that I had a single redeeming quality. They declared that — but no matter what they declared. I will not lower myself by detailing the pettinesses of which my sex is capable where jealousy is the

spur. My revenge was sweet enough, Heaven knows, without descending to their weapons. Let it suffice me that even if they had railed until doomsday they could not have belittled my triumph one jot, could not have wiped out the one indisputable bitter fact that I had had a better time than they.

And, oh, I did have a good time, a gorgeous time! It was a so much more agreeable sensation to feel mistress of the situation, so to speak, and no longer an inexperienced fledgling; to feel that I knew exactly what to say and do and in what spirit to understand the words and actions of others. All the little society dodges and devices, "the quips and cranks and wanton wiles," of the world of fashion, which but a year ago had seemed to me almost unattainable, became me now as naturally as the glove fits the hand. It was pleasant to be an adept, to know that I had hold of the reins and was giving bias to the chariot's course, instead of tamely sitting on the back seat and letting others do the driving. When amid the shrubbery of dimly lighted conservatories, fascinating monsters whispered words of honeyed wisdom in my ears, there was cause for exquisite felicitation in the consciousness that I was no longer a timid hare among ravening wolves.

As to the particulars of my life during this second winter I scarcely know what to say. To enter in detail into all the ramifications of my various *affaires du cœur* would weary your patience and tax my memory. Much as I saw of the other sex, and flattering to my pride as was the fact that before Lent any one of five men would on the slightest encouragement from me have said the sweetest words a girl can hear, my heart remained impervious to the shafts from Cupid's bow. I saw, without a qualm, the girls one by one drop from the ranks, and seek a haven in the arms of their adorers. I stood beside the altar with Maud Van Amburgh, and heard her promise to love, cherish, and obey Chicky Chalmers without the slightest emotion save joy that it was not I instead of her.

It had been Mamma's pet desire, as I have already stated, that I should marry Gerald Pumy-stone. Of all my admirers he was undoubtedly the most unexceptionable from a worldly point of view, and his assiduous devotions left now no room for doubting the seriousness of his intentions. Contact with the world had done much towards correcting the extravagance of his manners and taking the edge off his conceit, and almost against my will I found myself forced to confess that if I were going in purely for a *mariage de convenance* it would be

difficult to find a husband who combined so many advantages.

This view of the case necessarily obtruded itself upon me quite often, owing to the fact that it was the current impression in town that I was engaged to him. I was congratulated as his *fiancée* on numerous occasions, and people always shook their heads knowingly when informed by my family or friends that the report had no foundation. I do not think, however, that Mamma contradicted the story in the same downright way as she would have done had it not been dear to her heart, and had she not thought that it would some day be true. I know that she had a habit, when buttonholed on the subject, of smiling mysteriously and saying, "I know nothing about it; don't ask me," which left the interrogator convinced that I had agreed to become Mrs. Pumystone.

And in the balance with his garish devotion I had also to weigh the unremitting fidelity of Mr. Hill, who never, since that day when I made him so unhappy, had allowed me for one moment to doubt that his heart was still mine. His considerate, respectful friendship — for it was under the guise of friendship that we now interchanged ideas — had touched me so much by its complete sincerity that I had little by little come to feel an

interest in his welfare closely akin to sisterly affection; and if any one had suggested six months before that my heart would ever beat an atom faster at the name of Murray Hill, I should have regarded the soothsayer as daft. Do not imagine, because I make this little confession, that I felt for him anything more than deep respect for his character and intellect, and a desire that he should do well in the world. It was only natural, considering his kindness to me, and that he always seemed to have me in his thoughts, and was forever doing little things with a view to pleasing me, that I should reward his constancy with my genuine regard, if he was willing to accept that in lieu of love. Besides, I had grown imperceptibly to look upon him somewhat in the light of a guardian angel, or rather to feel that when talking to him I was under the influence of a man who amounted to something, and who had some ideas apart from the conventional frippery of my average worshipper. In his society I sometimes felt that life was stupid, but never that it was hollow and sawdusty. I knew that he was in earnest, I could see that everything he did was the fruit of serious thought tempered by principle, and though I often failed to sympathize with his views because I deemed them uninteresting, I had come, in spite of myself, to respect, admire, and even in a Platonic sense to love him.

Winter glided into spring, and the zephyrs of May found me making plans for the summer. I had heard from so many girls that you could have a perfectly killing time at Mt. Desert, that I was anxious to see for myself what the place was really like. So, by dint of teasing, I had persuaded Mrs. Gunn to agree to go down there for the month of July, and matronize me and her sister Peepy Marshmellow.

Our matron was not very enthusiastic on the subject, in fact, had strongly objected to giving up the luxuries of Newport, even for so short a time. "Take my word for it, my dear," said she, "Mt. Desert is plebeian to the core. *On dit* that all the men there go about in flannel shirts, and the girls never do their hair. One has to eat all sorts of horrid things, and climb down precipices for amusement. Fancy me climbing down a precipice with a young man in a flannel shirt. There's romance for you. If now they did the thing up brown, and wore rings through their noses, and tattooed themselves, there might be some amusement in it. It would be original, at least. But I have no patience with this attempt to blend the heathen savage with the man of culture. As the Hon. Hare Hare says, it is bad form."

"But, Birdie," protested her sister, "every one

says that it is awfully good fun. The scenery is perfectly splendid, and you take long walks and drives, and all that sort of thing, you know. Besides, you must see people in such a pleasant way. It would n't be necessary for you to climb if you did n't want to, and at a pinch, I dare say, we could even get up a hop for you."

"A hop, my child?" replied Mrs. Gunn. "Heaven knows it is not the absence of hops that I deprecate. I should only be too grateful for the rest. What I object to is this absurd mania for running about in old clothes, and making a guy of yourself in order to satisfy some notion as to its being more informal. I hate old clothes, and that word informal is one of the deadliest foes to higher civilization. It is only a synonyme for free-and-easy. I know what it signifies perfectly well. I was once informal, myself, delightfully informal. It means treating a man just like another girl, and treating a girl just like another man. It is n't natural. God never intended that the two sexes should gad about together like peas in a pod. That is what they do at Mt. Desert."

"Would you have them, my dear, bury themselves like oysters in their individual shells?" queried the pertinacious Peepy.

"You know that I am no prude," responded her

sister, "and no one has ever accused me before of lacking enterprise. In fact, I take rank among my peers as the embodiment of flippancy. I believe with all my heart in playing the butterfly; but then please remember, *mes enfants*, that the butterfly, with all its faults, is a fastidious creature. It can boast refinement as well as grace. Its most salient charm is the fascinating trick that it has of flitting about from flower to flower without allowing itself to be caught. It never lets itself be examined too closely. It pauses by the wayside just long enough to fether the gazer's eye, and then is off again. *Ça sent le mystère*. If it chances to fall into evil hands, and gets the dust or pollen, or whatever it is called, rubbed off its wings, the poor insect never looks the same afterwards. It has a cheap, dingy appearance for the future, and the critical votary of science turns up his nose at it.

"Now that is what happens, metaphorically speaking, at Mt. Desert. The average girl who goes there gets the pollen rubbed off her wings. She ceases to be content to captivate at a distance. Lured by the flattering snare of becoming intimate with or exerting influence over the other sex, she suffers herself to be made a boon companion of. Instead of remaining a bewitching enigma she

betrays to the masculine eye, to assimilate her to the insect aforesaid, the size of her head, the color of her spots, and the number of her stripes. The delightful gauze of mystery no longer enshrouds her. That plausible youth in the flannel shirt and knickerbockers, who, week in, week out, from dawn to dewy eve, has dogged her footsteps, has probed the secrets of her heart, and knows exactly what she thinks on every subject.

“How delightful, you say. Yes, my dears, for *him*. I agree with you, he is a very enviable man. But for *her*—there I beg to differ. I fail to appreciate the advantages of being mentally palmed over, even by a youth in a flannel shirt. But you shall try it for yourselves. I am the most good-natured person in the world. I have given my word, and you shall try it for yourselves.”

And so we did. One afternoon, some six weeks later, we steamed out of Boston harbor *en route* for Mt. Desert. With arms resting on the steamer’s rail, I sat looking out over the peaceful bay, lost in the train of dreamy melancholy that such surroundings are apt to induce. I was thinking of I scarcely know what,—of my past life, of my hopes for the future, of what a strange place this world is,—and revolving the thousand and one fancies that people an idle brain. Of a sudden I heard a voice

at my side say, "How do you do, Miss Palmer?" and, turning to meet it, I found myself confronting a tall, slender young man, whose identity was almost shrouded in a long, light-colored ulster, and round smoking-cap of kindred material.

"Why, Mr. Brooke!" I exclaimed, in genuine surprise. "How funny that we should meet after all! Are you really going to Mt. Desert?"

"That is my present intention, Miss Palmer, unless you succeed in persuading me to alter my plans."

I have omitted to state that among my other diversions of this winter had been a flying trip to Boston. It had been literally that, a flying trip. I had left New York on Monday morning, and returned home the following Saturday, so that I only had time to shake hands with a lot of nice people and repack my trunks. Everybody there was awfully kind to me. I was loaded with attention, and would have given worlds to have stayed longer. But there was no help for it. I had *promised* to be back in time for Grace Irving's dinner, which I would not have missed for anything.

With the majority of the people whom I met, as I have said, I merely exchanged a few words; but I must make an exception in the case of one

young man, — the one referred to above, of course, — whose devotion to me had been most flattering. For some reason or other he had seemed to take a great fancy to me, and as he was hand and glove with the nicest people, had been able to add immensely to my enjoyment by tipping the wink to attractive men, as Peepy Marshmellow expressed it, that I was worthy of cultivation. He never took his eyes off me for a moment, if he could help it, during my visit, and on the day of my departure for New York, appeared at the depot with some of the loveliest roses I ever saw, which he begged me to do him the favor of accepting. In the few moments left before the ringing of the last bell, we had mutually expressed our desire and hope of meeting again.

“Do you ever go to Mt. Desert in summer?” he had asked.

“I never have, but I am crazy to go.”

“I trust we may meet there this year, Miss Palmer.”

“I trust so too, Mr. Brooke,” had been my last words, as, warned by the ominous voice of the conductor, he backed his polite way out of the Pullman.

And now, curiously enough, our prayers — if prayers be not too strong a term — had been an-

swered, and here we were together again on the deck of the Mt. Desert steamer. Providence, thy ways are inscrutable, and we cannot understand them! Mr. Brooke told me, three weeks later, it was fate that brought us together. I should like ever so much to know whether destiny did have anything to do with it, or whether it was simply chance. I imagine that when he ascribed our meeting to fate he had more or less hopes of inducing me to live in Boston as a permanency, which may, of course, have colored his views. Poor fellow! If it *was* anything more than an accident, he must have been born under an unlucky star.

I have never seen him since we left Mt. Desert, but I have often thought about him. What a good time we had, and how thoughtful and attentive and kind he was during our stay there! It was a totally novel experience to me. With all my knowledge of the ways of men, flirtation with Mr. Brooke was like exploring an unknown country. He was so unlike a New-Yorker. It took, to begin with, so much more time to develop him. I found him at first secretive and undemonstrative as an owl. He was extremely polite, and was forever running after me, but in conversation I always got just so far and no farther, for at least

ten days subsequent to our arrival at Mt. Desert. The average New-Yorker, considering the opportunities, would have proposed, been refused, and have almost become convalescent within that time. After a while I admit that he began to enthuse a little, to use an Americanism, but it was always about *things*, not about me. I should never have known from his manner that he cared a straw for me. Even when we grew more intimate, and he confided to me all his secrets and feelings and ideas, I often felt like shaking him because of his quiet, unemotional way of expressing himself.

On returning one evening from a *tête-à-tête* with him on the water, during which, notwithstanding we had a full moon and a little skiff all to ourselves, he had been as indifferent in manner as if it had been broad daylight, I remember inquiring of Mrs. Gunn if she had noticed how dissimilar Mr. Brooke was to New-Yorkers.

"Why, my dear child," she replied, "they are totally different kinds of fish. The typical New-Yorker will rise in all kinds of weather and to almost any fly, no matter how showy. He has no objection to splash, and tinsel does not frighten him off. The danger comes when he begins to feel the hook—and I agree that you can never feel sure of him until he is landed; for even when

you have him on the bank at your feet, he will sometimes get away. But so far as rising is concerned, he will, as I have said, rise to *anything*.

“But a Boston trout is a shy, fastidious, capricious creature, and requires very different angling. Once hook him and you are all right. He dies like a lamb. A little wriggle of his tail, a feeble effort at a sulk, a half-hearted run down river, and it is all over. You can reel him in then at your pleasure. The difficulty lies in the *hooking*, and the worst of it is that you can never be sure what kind of fly will tempt him. If he happens to see one that he thoroughly fancies, and which is cast with sufficient skill to blind him to the fact that it conceals a hook, he will take it like a shot. But it is almost impossible to know beforehand what will get a rise out of him. His aristocratic nose turns up at morsels which a New-Yorker would snap up in the twinkling of an eye. Sometimes it is your sensible-looking, dull-hued fly that kills him. Oftener, perhaps, a modest, unpretentious fly, or even a dowdy fly with a big head, will give him the *coup de grâce*. Once in a while a tastefully gaudy fly or a graceful trig-looking little charmer does the business.

“The thing to avoid is all splash and noise. Anything loud is fatal, my dear, in nine cases out of

ten. If you let him see ever so slightly that you would like to catch him you are done for. No, *mon enfant*, these thoroughbred Boston fellows, even when they are tolerably fascinated, are terrible nibblers. They swim round and round the fly, and sometimes let it be carried off from under their very noses, because they can't quite make up their minds. They want to examine the bait from every standpoint. Fortunately, they are just as liable to be fooled as other fish if you give them time, but you must let them alone and not scare them.

“Take my sister Peepy, for instance. She would go down delightfully in some waters. She could lead big fish of a certain type a terrible rig. But a fastidious fish like Ernest Brooke would not look at her for a minute. If he chanced to see her floating on the stream, he would probably give her a cursory glance, and then, with a whisk of his little tail, go to the bottom, and never so much as wink at her for the future. It has often been my lot to be on capital fishing-grounds, where a half-dozen of these Boston fellows were lying lazily against the bottom with a bevy of garish flies dangling over their noses. All we could ever get out of them—I say ‘we,’ because I was once a garish fly myself—would be a wicked cock of the

eye, as if to say, 'We are n't so green as we look, my dears, — we are n't so green as we look!'

"Now in your case, Alice, it is very different. You have evidently succeeded in charming Mr. Brooke. I have admired from afar your consummate tact, and some day, love, he will take the hook with a vengeance and reward your labors."

"But what if I don't wish to hook him, Mrs. Gunn?"

"Wish to hook him? Why, my child, it would be simple idiocy not to hook him. Of course you would shake him off again after a while; but it would be a crying shame that, after having given you so much trouble, he should not be made to feel the barb."

This piscatorial conversation took place at a time when Mr. Brooke and I were still comparatively strangers. Afterwards I suppose that without exactly meaning to I did hook him and then shake him off again. There was no help for it; I did not care to pass my days in Boston, and, somehow or other, one does not feel at Mt. Desert that there is any particular harm in having a little fun. Perhaps the atmosphere of the place is to blame, but I know, at all events, that in trying to make him like me I experienced much fewer qualms than I should have at a more conventional resort.

I look back upon those six weeks at Mt. Desert in the light of a charming idyl. If I am ever blessed with a daughter, I have my doubts as to whether I shall allow her to go down there; but there is no denying the exquisite fascination of the spot. The stern bluff coast walled by giant crags, with the cruel ocean churning against their bases; the clear rare air that filled our weary lungs with a new life, and whispered to the timid maiden,

“Be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold,” —

when shall I cease to recall them with delight? The ever-varying inland range of hill and hollow, the blissful walks, the lengthy drives, the little harbor where we loved to float on peaceful nights beneath the silver moon, the icy fogs that chilled our very marrow, even the hunger that we shared together, — when will they be forgot?

Only fancy starting off in the morning with some chosen spirit, and wandering at the dictates of your own sweet will, until weary limbs warned you that to sketch together or to hear him read his favorite verses would be pleasanter than walking farther. And then what joy to fling one's self upon some fair hillside, where you could watch the blue sea sparkling in the distance, while, as in days of old, the gentle swain fingered the pipe or mur-

mured dreamy tales of love at your feet! Or, again, was it not soothing to the skipping spirit to lie at ease at night, in the stern of some skiff, wrapped in a heavy rug to satisfy your nervous matron, and suffer a faithful slave to paddle you lightly o'er the tranquil water? What girl would not think it fun? Did the woman ever live who could see no pleasure in it?

And did I, in the process, lose the lustre from my wings? I hardly know. Perhaps I did a little. I was very careful, I was extremely cautious, I did not become a regular Philistine, after the style of Peepy Marshmellow and others, but I suppose that I *was* just a *little* free-and-easy with Ernest Brooke and one other young man who was kind to me when the former was not around. I did not intend to. I remembered Mrs. Gunn's warning, and tried to be dignified and statuesque as possible, yet there were moments, I fear, when my animal spirits got the better of my discretion.

As for Peepy Marshmellow and some of the other girls, they were wild as hawks. They drove or picnicked or rowed or sailed or gadded with something in trousers the livelong day. Peepy managed to infatuate—I imagine it was a large shade hat cocked on one side of her head, and girt with a bandanna handkerchief that dealt the

wound — a youth from Boston whose sensibilities were less easily offended than Mr. Brooke's, and the way these two carried on was, as the lady's sister forcibly expressed it, "a caution to snakes." Compared with their conduct, mine was simply angelic. Even Mrs. Gunn descended at times from her high horse, and allowed her conventionalities to vanish before the Bohemian graces of a young New York artist, fresh from the studios of Paris. "My child," said she to me one evening, "my pride has had a fall. We sat by the sea to-day. He read aloud to me 'La Nuit de Mai,' in a red flannel shirt and knickerbockers, and I never even quivered. What would Stylington Ribblehurst say?"

Poor Mr. Brooke! I have used that expression in regard to so many young men, that I shall be liable to convey the impression that I was a heartless flirt. But such was not the case. My experience with Ernest Brooke was merely an episode, an idyl, — simply a digression from the beaten track of life, not intended to result in anything permanent. We both went into it in that spirit. We understood it perfectly; at least, I certainly did; and if he allowed himself to look upon our relation in any other light, it was his own fault. He ought to have known better. I was able now

to understand and even sympathize with the girl whose conduct under analogous circumstances, as related to me by Manhattan Blake, had seemed so inhuman.

Mr. Brooke reminded me in many ways of Mr. Blake. He was not so morbid and sensitive as the latter, but his tastes ran in a similar channel. He had the same yearning for an ideal existence, the same fondness for discussing plans and theories of living. He was a cotton-broker when at home, and belonged, as I have previously hinted, to one of Boston's oldest families. This was his vacation.

We became, in a certain sense, perfectly inseparable. Towards the end he must have told me everything about himself that he was at liberty to tell to anybody, and I gave myself away, as the phrase is, time and time again. What topic of interest did we not agitate? I used to sit beside him on the rocks, and read aloud some one of the attractive volumes of light literature that he had brought down with him, while he took sketches in water-color of the surrounding scenery. He had a good deal of cleverness with his brush, and I have to-day among my effects one of several charming little portraits that he made of me. I wonder if he has the others still.

An idyl. Yes, it was a summer idyl, nothing

more. We read together "Silas Marner," and Austin Dobson's "Vignettes in Rhyme," and Ruskin's "Sesamè and Lilies," and "The Monks of Thelema," and Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus." We analyzed such problems as these,—I made a little list of them in my diary at the time, and here are some of them:—

1. If it was necessary to choose between the two, would it be nobler to marry a person who came up to your ideal in other respects, but failed to fire your fancy, or a person who fired your fancy but failed to come up to your ideal?

2. Is it more ideal in a man who has been hopelessly unsuccessful in an *affaire du cœur* to live his life alone to the end or to try to find some other mate?

3. Would you rather love or be loved? (The same old problem that I discussed with Mr. Blake.)

4. If a man and a girl love one another, and, owing to pecuniary difficulties, there is no chance of their being able to marry, is it more conducive to the happiness of the girl that they should be engaged openly or engaged secretly?

5 (*a*). If a man is dead in love with a girl, but has no money, and has every reason to think that the girl, who has plenty of money for both (or whose father has), is in love with him, is it false

pride to refrain on account of his poverty from asking her to marry him?

(*b.*) In such a case, even if his pride should suffer thereby, ought he not to sacrifice his individual feelings to the happiness of the girl and ask her?

6. Do girls usually refuse men the first time they ask them?

Such was our life. But everything pleasant must have an ending. Six weeks are not an eternity, and the time came at last for me to bid good-by to this pastoral existence. Some three days before my departure, Mr. Brooke and I had a little scene, the particulars of which formed the only painful portion of this fleeting romance. How pleasant it was! — I mean the romance, the idyl. He was a charming fellow, and I shall never think of him but with the kindest feelings. About six months after our parting I heard of his engagement to a Boston girl, who, he had confided to me out rowing one gorgeous night, was his ideal morally and intellectually, but who, he said, had never, as I had done, kindled the divine spark within his breast. What a domestic rumpus I might make if I were a malevolent being!

Even Mrs. Gunn felt a pang at leaving dear **Mt. Desert**. Fond as she was of the convention-

alities of the higher civilization, as she termed it, it grieved her to part from her artist friend. "Let them say what they will, girls," said she, as we sat mournfully together in the stern of the steamer, gazing back at the receding shores; "it is vulgar, perhaps, but it is liberty. We return to chains and slavery."



V.

SETTLING DOWN.

WE returned to Newport in time to take part in the final festivities of the season. There were still two weeks remaining in which Mrs. Gunn could charm the public eye with her darling duds of ponies and faultless phaeton, ere the votaries of fashion scattered to their winter homes. Despite my being open to the charge of having revealed to the Philistines the size of my head and the number of my spots, society welcomed me back with open arms, and my quondam admirers flocked anew to the re-established shrine.

The same old story. Did it pall a little? No, I think not. To be sure, the life had for me no longer the charm of novelty, but in the enjoyment of its dash and whirl and joyousness and color, I still experienced a delight closely akin to the delirium of my past.

It matters not to describe in detail the tag end of that second season. No *dénouement* occurred to interrupt the gay tenor of my days. I found the same familiar friends, the same ardent admirers. I took part in the same pastimes and dissipations. I was ever conscious that I had but to give a sign to entitle me to a seat for life on Gerald Pumystone's drag. I knew that one little word would make me mistress of the house of Hare, or bring to my feet Murray Hill, now spending his hard-earned vacation in cruising among the fogs of Maine in vain pursuit of me. All this I knew, and yet my bosom stirred not. That these men loved me was no fresh discovery. Their protestations had become now twice-told ancient tales, that, feebly simmering in my breast, made me smile and sigh, and sigh and smile again, but yet I gave no sign. What could I do? Nothing. There was nothing to be done but let things take their course. To marry some one whom I did not love with all my heart would be dreadful, perfectly dreadful. But would not perpetual spinsterhood be ghastlier still? Thus beset by grave doubts and mistrustful even of myself, I drifted on and wondered what the end would be.

The end! It came at last, that end, or rather, when I think of my happy home and dear hus-

band and sweet little baby, I ought to say beginning. How it came about I scarcely know. What a curious creature a girl is! She delights in springing traps upon herself. She goes to bed fully convinced that she is one thing, and wakes up the next morning to find herself something totally different. So duplex is she that what she has flattered herself to be well-matured plans crumble to pieces in a moment before the breath of little undercurrents of thought. Men never know how near we women come to not doing the things we do and to doing the things we do not do. I love my husband with all my heart, Heaven knows. He is my pride, my glory, my strength, and when his arms are about me I feel happy enough to die. But he would tremble to know how near I came to not marrying him.

An attack of the dumps succeeded my return to New York, as had been the case the previous autumn. I have sometimes thought that had it been possible to be wildly gay all the year round, I might never have been married, but have danced through the usual mating-time of girls into a colorless middle age. The breathing-spells of autumn and spring that follow upon the gayeties of the summer and winter are trying days for a child of fashion. They not only dampen her spirits, but

lay bare the approaches to her heart as well. Self-introspection under certain circumstances is a dangerous game. To sit quietly at home and winnow your experience is a sorry substitute for being idolized, and even when propped up by literature, philanthropy, and kindred devices, a worldly creature such as I was then is apt to get a trifle bored in the process. And when a girl is bored with herself, then, O man, is the hour of your advantage.

I suppose, also, it is tolerably indisputable that a girl not absolutely regenerate is much more apt to be a prey to little whisperings of conscience when deprived of the tonic of bewildering excitement. The music no longer drowns the monitions of the still small voice, that suggests all sorts of horrible ideas in the line of wasted golden opportunities of life.

Some such experience was mine. The attack of the dumps that capped the climax to my summer's dissipations was a severe one, as my diary shall once more testify.

NOVEMBER 3.

I am growing old. Yes, I feel that I am growing old. I am falling into the sear and yellow leaf. My third winter, only think! When I hear those little chits, Posie Van Amburgh and Dora Davis, whom I have been in the habit of associ-

ating in my mind with children in arms and perambulators, talking about the raving time that they are going to have this winter, I feel like a grandmother. Oh, I am sick of it all. What is the use of this everlasting party-going? What do I go for? Is it to see any one in particular? No, emphatically no. I go simply because I have got into the habit of going and because everybody else does. I am an automaton, a machine. I can tell beforehand exactly who will speak to me, and what he will talk about, and what I shall say in reply. Take any man you please, and I know to a certainty what will be the subject of our conversation. It will vary with different individuals, to be sure; but with Gerald Pumystone, for instance, it will inevitably be a *résumé* of the fashionable intelligence of the week garnished with badinage; with Jimmy Noble, a summary of his professional hopes for the future; with Willy Easton, a scientific discussion; with "Poodle" Van Ulster, a chit-chat on art, and so on all through the list. They each remind me of a musical box with only one tune. I like them all collectively, but individually they oppress me.

I recognize that, socially speaking, I am fast becoming an old woman. I shall be just tolerated this winter, and another season will see me on the shelf. I am beginning to discern what look

like little crow's-feet round my eyes, and the peach-bloom is fading from my cheeks. The respect and veneration with which I am treated by the "buds" is more galling to me than wormwood. But what on earth am I to do if I don't go to parties? Some of the girls talk about having so many resources. I have not got any resources. I have tried to go wild over all sorts of things. I have dabbled in literature and languages and history and charity, and taken painting lessons, and cooked a little, and gone straight through the list of avocations open to girls, to see if I could not discover a taste for something. I can't. It is useless. I have not a taste of any kind in the true sense of the word. Of course I take more or less pleasure in my literature and charity, and the cooking-school was rather amusing at first. The fact that you are deliberately trying to improve yourself casts a certain negative glamour over such pursuits, and makes you think that you are tremendously interested in them even when you know that you are not. But I am sick of them. The idea of comparing them for a moment for real pleasure with the enjoyment you derive from parties seems to me like rank hypocrisy. I have been indulging long enough in the flattering delusion that I adore the tranquil delights of knowledge. I suppose it is an

awful thing to say, but I really believe that I *hate* them. Of course I don't mean that I object to books at the right time, but what I like is people. Books are all very well, but when any girl tells me she prefers reading a book to talking to a man I always set her down as mendacious or else a little simple.

It is a frightful confession to make. What would men think if they really knew that the mass of girls prefer talking to them to anything else in the world! We all squirm at the thought of owning it to ourselves, but isn't it so? With all my advantages I sometimes feel that it was what is called tough luck to have been born a girl. A man has a so much wider field for his wits to wander in. He adores our sex, I know. He calls us dear little things, and chucks us under the chin. He becomes dreadfully unhappy if we do not do what he wants us to. We are a superior species of toy. He makes pets of us, vows to love and cherish us, and so he does. He loves us very much, but then, alas! he loves all sorts of things besides girls. He does not love the other things perhaps quite so much as he loves us, but there is no use in denying the gloomy fact that we are only one item in his existence, and that he is the sum and substance of ours.

Of course I do not really wish that I was a man, but is n't it almost humiliating to feel that while he is learning to be of use in the world, we girls are, so to speak, on exhibition? It is rather a homely way of stating it, but it is undeniably the truth that from the age of eighteen until she is either married or shelved a girl is on exhibition. Our Mammamas try to disguise the fact by tickling our fancies with all sorts of kickshaws in the shape of dresses and parties and other delightful bait, but in spite of it all I feel in my heart of hearts that I at present am very pretty to look at, but horribly useless. I am a sort of Dresden shepherdess. It cost a mint of money to make me what I am, and yet all I am good for is ornament. A genuine Dresden shepherdess could end her sufferings by smashing herself; but if I should commit suicide it would be ascribed to blighted affections. Heigh-ho!

I am in the blues of course. I am aware that all this savors dreadfully of morbidness. I began this tirade by abusing parties, then I inveighed against the dulness that results from staying at home, and now I am abusing parties again. What am I to do? What is to be the end of it all? I suppose that I ought to get married. The other girls seem to get married, and Mamma says that I ought to. But if so, to whom? There is the rub,

as I have said over and over again. I do not love anybody, and I do not see that I am ever likely to. What a miserable girl I am! Is it absolutely necessary to love a man before you marry him? I wonder if it really is. Oh, I am tired — tired — tired! I cannot write any more to-night. I will go to bed.

NOVEMBER 15.

Mamma has been upbraiding me to-night for my coldness to Mr. Pumystone. She says that in refusing to encourage his suit I am flying in the face of Providence, and that it is very wrong for a girl on account of a few absurd scruples to let slip such an opportunity of being happy for life with an estimable young man. It seems to me that she begs the question. My absurd scruples, as she calls them, are that I do not love Mr. Pumystone. And such being the case I cannot see how she can feel so sure that I would be happy with him.

Mamma declares that I owe it to my family to make an advantageous match. I grant that that is so in a certain sense, but I am not aware of having shown any disposition to do otherwise. If it was a question of throwing over Mr. Pumystone for some one from the gutter, there might be cause for complaint. But I have no such design. All I desire is to be let alone.

Of course, if it was a matter of dire necessity, I could swallow him. We are both of us tolerably good-natured, and probably should not fight. If, for instance, as we read in novels, I could save my family from starvation by such a step, I would not hesitate a moment. But inasmuch as I was born in such a condition of life as to be able to marry purely with a view to my own happiness, I fail to see the force of Mamma's logic.

The doubt in my own mind is as to whether I am ever likely to care for any one in the ardent way I hear others describe. If I am never to reach that pitch, I might as well make hay while the sun shines and secure a comfortable establishment while I can. It nearly breaks my heart, however, to think of playing the iconoclast, and smashing the idols of my youth which I have clung to through thick and thin. Frivolous and worldly as I have been, I have ever secretly cherished the hope of experiencing some day that ecstatic feeling which, however overrated it may be, cannot be wholly mythical. The little feeble spark kindled in my breast during my *contretemps* with Manhattan Blake taught me that it is not all sham. But whether destiny has such bliss in store for *me* is a totally different question.

It is awfully hard to decide. As Mrs. Gerald

Pumystone, I should be able to satisfy all my desires in a society way, and fondness for the gay world is certainly my ruling passion. Everything that makes life attractive in a worldly sense would be mine. I feel that it would not take a great deal of argument to persuade me to follow Mrs. Gunn's advice, and merge myself forever in the great vortex of fashion. I realize that I am on the verge, but I still shrink, oh, I shrink from taking the plunge. Something, I don't know what it is, but something tells me that I was made for better things than that. Even when I acknowledge to myself that I am no longer a silly sentimental girl, but a grown woman, and that romance is not, as I once supposed, the sole consideration in life, my conscience—if it be that I still have a conscience—whispers, "Cling to your ideals. They are a woman's guardian angels."

But as I have already said, time and time again, what is to be the result supposing I do cling to them? Does the prospect for the future disclose any greater attractions than the present offers? Would living a single, solitary life in obedience to these lofty notions, which may possibly, after all, be illusory, make me happier than being very comfortable all my days with a highly respectable person for whom I have no partic-

ular aversion? There is the whole question in a nutshell, and I am totally at a loss how to answer it.

I am old enough, of course, to understand that *mariages de convenance* are very common even in this country. Quantities of girls in my situation have accepted much less endurable husbands than Gerald Pumystone, and lived happily. In France, — why, in France such scruples as mine would be incomprehensible. Still America is not France, and with my associations I cannot help feeling a little that wedding to obtain an establishment implies a sacrifice of self-esteem. If I were a man I might settle the matter by tossing up a cent, I suppose. But, alas, I am only a girl, and lack initiative.

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These extracts from my impressions, as registered at the time, indicate pretty clearly the vacillating condition of my mind during the stagnant weeks of that autumn. Looking back upon it all now, and being of course a better judge of the probabilities of the case than any one else can possibly be, I am bound to confess that it is my candid opinion that if nothing had happened to prevent my going out into society my third winter, I should have yielded to the voice of the tempter, and pleased Mamma by becoming Mrs. Gerald

Pumystone. I have very little doubt that such would have been the course of events. I do not see very well how I could have helped drifting into a fashionable married woman, unless of course (as is always within the range of possibilities) some one new and very charming had suddenly appeared upon the scene. The outside pressure brought to bear upon me was becoming more considerable every day, and the chances are, I rather think, ten to one, that another winter of gayety would have sealed the fate of my ideals.

I frankly admit that, considering how happy I am now and the poetic nature of the theme, it is a very matter-of-fact statement to say that if the death of my aunt had not obliged me to temporarily renounce society I should undoubtedly have wedded another man. But such is the case. As I have already mentioned, I worship my husband's very footsteps, and thank Heaven every day that things turned out as they did; but is n't it strange — it is everybody's lot, I know, but it comes home to a girl more closely when considered in connection with the great event of her life — that such an apparently collateral circumstance should have worked so vital results? The fate of the majority of girls in a similar situation would have been to marry Mr. Pumystone. I owe it to a freak of destiny

that I did not follow the natural tendencies of the victim of a gay career, and drift into a *mariage de convenance*.

I married Murray Hill. I became the wife of the man at whom I have laughed so many times in these pages. Now do not imagine for one instant that I desire to escape from the consequences that this confession involves. I am perfectly aware that I shall be called inconsistent, and I glory in the truth of the accusation. Let me anticipate the world's criticism by pleading guilty to the whole tissue of charges that will be heaped upon me. "You made such dreadful remarks about him," it will be said. "You called him poky and uninteresting. You refused him, and proffered him a stone in the form of Platonic friendship when he sought for the bread of love. You treated Mrs. Gunn's warning in connection with him, to beware of persevering men, with scornful incredulity, and drew that sarcastic little picture of conubial bliss in which you figured as a stocking-darner at his feet, looking forward to his smile as a pet animal to a lump of sugar." Yes, I am perfectly aware of it. I know it. It is all true. Taunt me as much as you please. I acknowledge everything, even to that nasty little fling I made about the dear fellow's riding-straps. My sole

defence shall be that I changed my mind, — a woman's privilege, — and that I love him.

What worked the change, you will ask. As I have already stated, physically speaking, it was my aunt's death, which rendered it necessary for me to forego all commerce with the gay world. From the moment that I relapsed into this enforced quietude, my life became a gradual but steady march towards the altar. To begin with, I was extremely fond of my aunt. I felt her loss very keenly; and I think it was Mr. Hill's sympathy and consideration during my affliction that first touched my heart in his favor. I could not help contrasting his refined methods of expressing his interest in my distress with Gerald Pumystone's fleshly remark that it was an awful bore, I would not be able to go anywhere all winter. Little by little, almost without knowing it, I grew to look forward to Mr. Hill's visits, and, strangely enough, to feel positive happiness in his presence. His strength of character, his earnestness and sweetness of life, had come to overshadow, almost to conceal, the little peculiarities and awkwardnesses of person and manner which I must confess that even to this day he has never entirely got the better of. We saw a great deal of each other during the winter. He lent me books, and tried to

inspire me with an interest in serious things. So far as tangible results went I do not think that his efforts in that line were altogether successful. His real success lay in the capture of my heart. It is in a certain sense embarrassing, almost humiliating to have to own it, but I awoke one morning to find myself in love with Murray Hill.

Perhaps it was because I had grown older. I have already suggested that being bored with myself had something to do with it. I am ready to acknowledge almost anything as a cause. I do not even claim that my feeling for Mr. Hill when I accepted him was so absorbing a passion as I might have felt at an earlier stage under certain circumstances for somebody else, or as some of the other girls have felt before marriage for their future husbands. There was nothing platonic about it, but, on the other hand, it lacked the ecstatic frenzy which some declare essential to the genuine article. I loved him, I am sure of that. Not so much, of course, as I love him now (because I will not own any girl my superior in the love I bear my husband now), but it was nevertheless *love*. The transition from friendship to that state of mind was gradual, but none the less real.

My passion for Mr. Hill was not of such an

overpowering nature, for instance, as to blind me to the fact that he had faults. In every-day parlance we regard it as an axiom that no one is wholly free from blemishes; but this, to the contrary notwithstanding, I have known of many a girl who has been so transported with bliss and drugged with sentiment at the time of her engagement as to really believe her future lord absolutely flawless. The rapture engendered by such a delusion must be more than counterbalanced by the rough awakening process through which these enthusiasts almost necessarily pass after marriage; although, to be sure, there are now and then examples of maidens so simple-minded and idolatrous as to carry the innocent hallucination with them to the grave. "How charming! Scoff not at these children of nature," cries the voice of the poet of idealism. I am aware of the barbarity of my sentiment. I know my words sound very heartless; but only think what a bore a dog-Tray kind of wife must become to a man who seeks for intelligent companionship and discriminating sympathy, or into what a tedious egotist the husband who enjoys such namby-pamby molly-coddling must degenerate. What a goose a person must be to think a husband or wife cleverer, better, or more sensible than the rest of the

world! Take, for instance, dear Marion Furbush, who is guileless as a turtle-dove. I do not suppose the idea has ever entered her head, or ever will unless some one is cruel enough to undeceive her, that anybody equal to her John has ever existed before, at least in this part of the globe. She thinks each word that falls from his lips wisdom, pure and unadulterated, and that everything he does must be right. She loves nothing better than to sit beside him and look up into his face while he is at work and if he sees fit to put out his hand to stroke her hair and call her his kitten, which is his usual expression of endearment,—I have stayed at their house,—her cup is full, and she purrs with pleasure, like the animal aforesaid. If I ever chance to speak of Murray and my happiness, she cannot help implying by her manner (the poor little thing would never be intentionally rude) that she considers my husband all very well, but as to comparing him for an instant with her John, she would as soon think of putting a heathen savage on a par with a missionary. Now John Furbush, as everybody knows, is an excellent, good-hearted fellow, with very fair abilities, no tact, and considerable self-complacency. He is dyspeptic, but in spite of this makes an admirable husband, and no one denies his solid worth; but

to say that there are not dozens of other men in the community who are his equals and superiors is simply nonsense.

Now, where I think my years of frivolity have given me an advantage over many other girls is in such ways as this. I have seen the great world. I have become tolerably familiar with the weaknesses of men. There is little danger of my mistaking my ducks for swans. I will even hazard the assertion that, as things have turned out, I am now more supremely, more intelligently happy than I could have been had I never known what it was to be a frivolous girl. I admit it was a dangerous game to play. I have already acknowledged that I probably owe my salvation to a freak of destiny. But granting this to be so, am I not, considering the result, rather to be envied than pitied, congratulated than maligned? Results are possibly only a specious form of argument, but there is, at any rate, a pardonable satisfaction in getting the laugh upon your critics even where you are in the wrong, especially when they are other girls.

As to the details of my abdication, I shall preserve a discreet silence. Sweet as it was, it could not but be galling to the pride withal. Shall I ever forget that mingled feeling of joy and despair

that told me I was vanquished? However great the rapture subsequent to capitulation, the act of surrender is far from unalloyed bliss to a sensitive-souled, proud girl. No true woman renounces her independence without a struggle. Truly could I apply the words of the poet to my own case: —

“ With her as with a desperate town,
Too weak to stand, too proud to treat,
The conqueror, though the walls are down,
Has still to capture street by street.”

And prior also to the period of decision what agonies of doubt did I not undergo in making up my mind? The symptoms were analogous to those experienced in my relations with Mr. Blake, but much more violent and racking. To speak of them in detail would be to a great extent repetition, not to mention any scruples I may feel on the score of such a revelation being treason to my husband, who would doubtless prefer to have the veil drawn over the minutiae of his courtship. Let it suffice that I yielded.

The world received the news of our engagement without manifesting much enthusiasm. Everybody thought it very nice and rational, but it was easy to discern that the predominant feeling was one of disappointment at my not having made a more brilliant match in the worldly sense of the word. My

career had been so dazzling, and I had been such a quasi public character, so to speak, that society evidently felt it had a right to expect my final exploit to be in keeping with what had gone before. The current criticism was, naturally enough, "All very well, but tame." Mrs. Gunn's animadversions, for instance, were, I imagine, tolerably characteristic of the sentiments of the fashionable set on the subject. "Eminently safe, my dear Alice," said she, "highly respectable; but *ce n'est pas une grande passion*." During a further discussion of the theme, although admitting the ethical advantages that were likely to flow from the alliance, she alluded to my future lot as an organ-grinder sort of existence. She was very sweet about it in the main, however, and sent me a gorgeous silver pitcher and salver as a wedding-present.

I must do Mamma the justice to say that whatever her private feelings may have been, she welcomed Murray as a son-in-law in the most angelic manner. To be sure, there was nothing about him of which she could seriously complain except his want of property, for his family were unexceptionable in every way, and his personal character above reproach. But yet, knowing as I did how much her heart had been set on my marrying a mint of money, her behavior exceeded my most rose-

colored expectations. Papa, who had always liked Mr. Hill, was greatly pleased. In spite of every precaution the report of our engagement leaked out two days before we intended it to be known. I was never able to discover who let the cat out of the bag. I had previously told three people, Grace Irving, Peepy Marshmellow, and Mrs. Gunn, and Mr. Hill had confided it to a man or two, but all of them solemnly asseverated that they never mentioned it to a soul. It was not, of course, of any material importance, but annoying nevertheless. Our engagement was formally announced on Easter Monday, and by dint of teasing, we persuaded our respective families to allow us to be married the following June.

And so I have come to speak of my wedding, the final incident in the drama of maidenhood, the crowning episode of woman's life. How funny it seemed to know that I was really going to be married at last and settle down into a demure, sober matron! As I lay upon my bed thinking over the past three years of enjoyment, I could not but dwell on the change that had come over my thoughts and impressions since the evening I ascended Mrs. Van Amburgh's staircase in the robes of a *débutante*. How long ago it seemed since I gave that fatal bud to Mr. Blake and first listened

to Harry Coney's dulcet tones! My life had been since then merely that of the ordinary girl whose position and graces entitle her to consideration in the world of fashion, and yet, withal, it was curious, in retracing the course of my days, to note the vacillations I had myself undergone, the potent influences I had had upon the lives of others. Much more than man's is the life of a girl swayed by light touches. Mere breaths decide her destiny, and trivial currents are her guides and counsellors. How she will act she cannot tell, and why she acts is equally inscrutable. Her hours are passed in playing hide-and-seek with her own fancies, and even to herself her nature is an amazing riddle. But yet, in spite of mystery and maze, some fostering spirit seems to guide her wavering footsteps, and, though slight forces apparently govern her decisions, a subtle, unerring instinct, ever present, whispers to her which breeze to welcome, which to disregard. If woman but listen to the behests of her own nature, is she not secure? Her whims, where instinct prompts, are whims no longer. It is when she acts in disobedience to these dictates that she fails.

Upon my wedding-day the sun shone brightly, and all the world and their mothers flocked to church to see me made a wife. While the bells of

Trinity pealed forth a joyous chime, I stood once more within my chamber, the centre of an admiring group gathered to see me dressed.

"Alice, you will be late." It was Papa's voice from below, and again it was my turn to cry, "Yes, Papa, in one minute."

Busy fingers, responsive to Mamma's searching criticism, put the finishing touches to my garb of snow, and smoothed the flowing veil. Once more my aunt's approving smile and the cruder flatteries of my quondam nurse nerved my trembling spirit as I swept down the staircase. They handed me my roses, sweet gift of him who had become now dearer to me than all the world beside, and then — then, a moment later, the home of my girlhood was my home no longer.

Scurrying past the gaping crowd that lined the church's portal, we paused a moment while the doors were unbarred and the promised signal given to the organist. Then, after a frightful moment of delay, we walked slowly up the aisle to the music of Mendelssohn's Wedding March, Grace Irving and Mabel Murray in advance, and I following, trembling and pale, on Papa's arm. All New York was in the pews, eager and straining every nerve to catch a glimpse of my face and dress, and it would be difficult for girls who

have not had a kindred experience to imagine what a ghastly feeling such scrutiny inspires in one.

Murray was waiting for us at the chancel, with Willy Easton, his best man. Before the altar, and in the presence of my friends, he placed the little ring upon my finger which has never left it since (I have seen some girls use theirs as whist-counters), and vowed to love and cherish me forever. I promised to obey and care for him, and then as man and wife we knelt together. A moment after, tearful and pale, with joy in my heart, but too timid to glance to right or left, I walked down the aisle, clinging to my husband's arm, and sought a shelter in the protecting carriage. I have since been told that I looked proud and queenly, but I fear the lips that let fall that speech were skilled in flattery.

The reception was crowded. It seemed dreadfully funny to hear myself called Mrs. Hill instead of Miss Palmer, and I was so dazed with excitement and embarrassment that my remarks to the people who came up to congratulate me must have been fearfully vague and meaningless. The first part of the time we had to undergo a regular siege of hand-shaking. Several old gentlemen who were friends of the family, Colonel Huckins among them,

claimed the privilege of kissing the bride,—an operation which I tried to bear with due equanimity, but which could scarcely be called exhilarating.

My friends turned out in full force. The Van Roosters, Ribblehursts, Eastons, Gunns, Marshmellows, Clymbers, Chalmers, Pumystones, Van Amburghs, and all the swells. “Poodle” Van Ulster condescended to wish me joy in company with Muchfeedi Pasha, who had come on from Washington for the express purpose. The Honorable Hare Hare showed that he bore no malice by sending a lovely basket of flowers and afterwards appearing in person. Even Mr. and Mrs. Coney, whom I had thought it best on the whole to invite, offered me their congratulations in a smiling, friendly way, and I made an effort to treat “dear Harry” with sufficient politeness. She looked, I thought, coarse and dumpy, but was gorgeously attired. The greatest surprise to me of all, however, was the appearance of Mr. Manhattan Blake, who had arrived from Europe the day before. I must acknowledge I felt a guilty qualm or two when he came up and shook hands in a way which, though necessarily a little constrained, was evidently intended to be kind. It was a blessed relief, though, to feel, as I looked in his pale interesting face, unchanged except for

a thin pair of whiskers and slightly foreign air, that my fancy for him was completely dead. His presence did not awaken in me the slightest thrill, — a circumstance which, though perhaps natural under the circumstances, was extremely fortunate. I thought I detected in one of his glances a shadow of reproach, but very likely my suspicion was the fruit of an over-alert imagination, especially as the few words he said were commonplace and unemotional. Mr. Pumystone was also present, — in fact, had been one of the ushers at the church. He had sent me, a fortnight previous, a very handsome pair of gravy tureens, which, all things considered, struck me as remarkably nice of him. I could not help feeling that if they really did care for me still, it must be terribly hard for both these poor fellows to see me standing there the bride of another. But, as I have said before, such is life. I did not ask them to fall in love with me, and was it my fault that they chose to do so?

Presently I was carried off to cut the cake, and a little later they hurried me up stairs to change my dress for the journey. From that time, until I found myself in the carriage with my dear husband, driving away amid a shower of shoes and rice, everything seemed a tearful blank. Then we turned to one another with love in our eyes.

What he said to me I have treasured up as the sweetest words in the world, and I am sure that he will never forget what I said to him. Grace Irving has confided to me that when she subsequently married Thedy Ribblehurst, he said to her, under similar circumstances, —

“And the stars shall fall and the angels be weeping
When I cease to love her, my queen, my queen.”

And I know as a fact that practical-minded Pussy Baiker asked her new lord and master if he had got the tickets. But what Murray and I said to one another the curious world shall never know.

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We are very happy. My husband's practice is increasing daily, and we have a little girl who promises to be as giddy as her mother. Murray has improved immensely in his manners. I knew that he would, or I should never have married him. Mrs. Gunn's prophecy that he would never learn to enter a room properly was correct, but he has grown really fond of the dinners and small parties that we go to and occasionally give. He recognizes perfectly that my previous education has been such that a little innocent amusement is still a boon to me, and I, in turn, make a point of not keeping him out too late on such occasions. There is no use in

denying that society is to me what his profession and books are to him, and we each take delight in humoring the tastes of the other. If I say he is a broader man, may I not claim that I am no longer a frivolous girl?

The great world is still gay. Mrs. Gunn is charming and fashionable as ever, and occasionally enlivens my organ-grinder existence by dropping in for a friendly chat. She continues, however, to declare that I have thrown myself away, but I think she rather admires Murray in spite of herself. Peepy Marshmellow is in England. She married the Honorable Hare Hare some six months after my wedding, and rumor says that she is likely to be Countess of Hammerhead before many days.

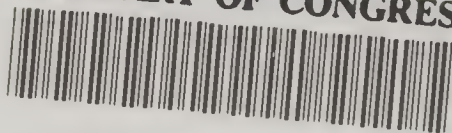
I heard not long ago from one of my friends that Mr. Manhattan Blake confided to her he thanked his lucky stars he had never married Alice Palmer. As the boys say, that sounds well. If he is satisfied, I am sure that I am. He is still unmarried, and although his health prevents him from practising law, devotes his leisure to literary and artistic studies.

In spite of my evil wishes, the Coneys are apparently happy. "Dear Harry" has made a large sum of money, people say, by speculating in some

way connected with margins and "Union Pacific." I do not understand such matters, but I feel sure I shall yet live to hear Mamie crying for Sister Anna from the housetops. At present, however, I rather envy her her new drag.

Gerald Pumystone's engagement to Nuny Clymber was announced last week. She had been out six winters.

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